

GUARDIAN ANGELS

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LONDON

EVELEIGH NASH

1913

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BOOK I

ROSALIE

CHAPTER I

THE HAVANA-COLOURED CAR

THE huge Havana-coloured limousine with its chauffeur and liveried footman in front, one of those luxurious modern vehicles, crammed with women's toilettes and hats, which, as symbols of our magnificence on wheels, have so recently replaced the graceful equipages of the past, slackened its noiseless advance at the foot of the Trocadero incline, as if it were hesitating about crossing the Pont d'Iéna, and then stopped dead. The footman jumped to the ground, received orders at the door of the car, and before resuming his place consulted the policeman standing at the angle of the bridge. Eager to oblige these rich people, that functionary crossed the road, and had a brief colloquy with the footman, which was interrupted by a consultation of his road-map.

"Rue des Bergers," he concluded at last, "you have only to cross the bridge and follow the quay as far as the Rue de Javel. . . . Yes, it's the third on the right in the Rue de Javel."

A lady in chinchillas,—a fine lady in the Parisian manner—forty years old, rather stout, rather jaded and carefully made-up, thanked the policeman from the inside of the car. He saluted, the footman hastily regained his place, and the limousine resumed its noiseless course, carrying across the bridge and then

over the quay its burden of femininity, decked out in all the furs of fashion.

For, beside the chinchillas of Madame Maurice Corbellier, wife of the china manufacturer of Aubervilliers and owner of the car, there was also inside the blue fox of little Loute Corbellier, a thinnish blonde just at the awkward age; the ermine stole of the tall, graceful Josette Croze, daughter of the Deputy of Romarantin, now Under-Secretary of Fine Arts; finally the vision, scarcely less arresting, of Mlle. Magda Riemann, Josette's German governess. The enormous hats which they all wore, even the governess, concealed their faces, but all the same the few stragglers on the quay turned round to catch this fortunate glimpse of elegance in which the pretty figures of Magda and Josette rose like a veritable *ensemble* of youth.

Scarcely quickening its pace, for the road was bad, rutted by heavy cart-wheels, the limousine followed the quay, turned into the Rue de Javel, and then into the Rue des Bergers, a road walled in by mysterious buildings, by vague enclosed ground-plots, and by the façades of small dwellings belonging to retired householders. Everything about it had a quiet, neglected provincial air under the delicate sunlight of this waning January afternoon, mild as the harbinger of spring. It was Magda who, leaning over the speaking-tube, ordered the car to pull up in front of a building of some importance but with that humble, and melancholy appearance which betrays a hospital, a house of retreat, or a school for the poor. The main building could be seen emerging from the depths of a courtyard, behind the railed wall which ran along the street between two outhouses roofed

with flat tiles. The car pulled up before the first of these, on the low door of which was inscribed in black capital letters the word "Entrance."

The four women alighted, Madame Corbellier being assisted by the assiduous footman; she suffered from rheumatism, though she was too well trained a coquette to admit it. One could now see their faces: the freckles, the insipid features, the restless yellowish eyes of little Loute Corbellier; the broad shoulders of the German, a fine young woman who was getting close to thirty, a woman built for carrying burdens, with a face rather large and a little heavy, the complexion coarse and mottled and oily at the temples. There was something tired and worn in the grey eyes, and about the corners of the mouth—a fine girl for all that, made to tempt men by the powerful coils of her almost red hair, by her bust, by her hips, by her strong mouth, by the indefinable something that lurked voluptuously in her glance, now smiling and intelligent, now lingering as though caught in a dream. For the rest, she was carefully dressed, and obviously acclimatized for years to the tone of Paris. Close to her, Josette Croze, Magda's pupil, was waiting for Madame Corbellier to complete her difficult descent from the car. Hers was the silhouette of the typical young Parisian of to-day, the regular new type, as it is being fashioned by the manners and modes of the moment. Tall, slender, but not thin, the small head rising from the chin over a graceful neck, the whole body was sheathed in a costume of the very latest design, like an Egyptian bas-relief, which she irresistibly evoked. The bust was almost invisible, but it was one that a sculptor would have divined as being firm and true, while the breasts were thrust

apart as in ancient sculpture. She was straight-fronted; her hands and feet sufficiently long and exquisitely outlined. Her hair was of a French brown without a shade of black; it was wavy and glistening, and the gleams that flashed from it had the indecisive blue of smoke. Her complexion was that of a marvellously white camelia, but for all that she was by no means pale, as the rose tint of rich blood could be clearly divined beneath. No feature was insignificant, merely pretty or interesting, but on the contrary betrayed an exact design of nose, forehead and mouth. And, as though to animate what might be considered as too regular, too infallible in this *ensemble*, there were two deep blue eyes—the rarest colour of all in woman's eyes—two eyes of so profound an innocence that a Valmont would have lowered his own beneath their glance. Even as she stood motionless, one could realize the suppleness of her limbs, and detect that she had been trained in every form of sport. She was, in fact, the finished product of the training of to-day: intelligent without any deep culture beyond foreign languages and music, but champion of the Dinard tournaments, a first-rate rider, and perfectly at home on both skates and skis. And thanks to a sustained sense of freedom in her easy and harmonious carriage she possessed an expansive grace in her movements that was scarcely known among Frenchwomen in the old days. In short, Josette in broad daylight was delightful, Magda delicious, and even Loute, saved from downright ugliness by the sly intelligence in her face, was by no means displeasing. But this clear light did not ~~not~~ Madame Corbellier at all, and, in spite of her veil, in spite of the shadow of her hat with its *aigrette*, her

laborious make-up produced a curious effect on the slate-coloured face, which the rouge on her lips seemed to gash across like a wound.

"They have been getting on," said Magda, as she measured with her eyes the vast dismal building. "In my time it was just a ground-floor in the Rue de Lourmel. You remember, Josette, when you came there to choose me with Madame?"

"Are you quite sure that this is the place?" asked Madame Corbellier without giving Josette time to answer.

"Oh, yes, Madame, look!"

On an oval brass plate which ornamented the hall door they read the inscription, "*The Grillon*" (Registry Office).

"Good, let's go in. You go first, Mag, will you?"

Madame Corbellier said this in a tired, rather disgusted voice which seemed to betray the whole boredom of this little excursion. Magda—Mag, as Josette called her, abbreviating in French fashion the German diminutive—obeyed and opened the hall door. A winding passage led on the left to the paved courtyard, and at the very end of it a door opened into an office. Josette did not enter it, but having reached the courtyard, stood there lost in reflection. Madame Corbellier and Loute followed Mag into the office.

"Ah, it's always the same Mademoiselle Esther!" exclaimed the governess as she recognized the miserable lady-clerk, who, dressed in black and with her bust enveloped in a black woollen shawl, was glancing through a ledger alone in this narrow room in which a dwarf stove was spluttering. Mademoiselle Esther rose to her feet and with all her grotesque body, with

all her bloodless face, she saluted these furs and these flowered hats which had penetrated into her lair. Then from the ashes of her eyes, a faint spark kindled.

"Mademoiselle Magda! Now I remember you! How good-looking you have got and how much stronger!"

She hastened to offer them chairs; Madame Corbellier sat down. Loute's eyes went ferreting round in every direction.

"What can I do for these ladies or for you, Mademoiselle Magda?"

Mag turned to Madame Corbellier inquiringly.

"Oh, well," began that lady in a hesitating and yet voluble manner, as though she herself were by no means sure about what she wanted, "it's like this, my daughter, Loute, her name is Helène (but we all call her Loute), had a German governess, quite nice and painstaking and all that, who left us last month to get married. Mademoiselle Mag told us that your establishment finds situations for foreign governesses."

"Yes, yes, Madame, we have fifteen of them here in residence at this moment, and besides that many of them are on our books without being in residence, Mademoiselle Magda can tell you that our work is a serious undertaking, and that it is under the patronage of the Embassies of Austria, Russia and England.

"I know, I know," put in Madame Corbellier, "then you are sure to have what I want?"

"Would Madame like to see a young girl at once? I have one" (she glanced at the open pages of her register) "who arrived from Hanover yesterday, and who knows French well."

"Ah, but look here, German and French—that's not enough. I must have some one who speaks Italian perfectly on account of my son, Jacques."

"Madame has a little boy as well?"

"No, no, not a little boy; Jacques is twenty years old."

The lack of comprehension which showed itself in every feature of Mademoiselle Esther's face was too much for the dwindling endurance of Madame Corbellier. "You explain the business, my good Mag, I leave it to you. I'm almost stifling here. I'm going to have a breath of fresh air. Come, Loute."

She rose from her chair, nodded in a friendly way to Mademoiselle Esther, and with her little girl went off to rejoin Josette, who had been walking about the courtyard to kill time.

As soon as Mag saw that they were out of earshot, she burst out laughing.

"My poor dear Esther, what price the mother Corbellier! and to think that she is still responsible for the happiness of my master, the Under Secretary!"

"Ah, she's the friend of M. Croze, is she?"

"Yes, it's been going on for the last eleven years. Only just now Emmeline is getting a little too mature, and so he has a leaning towards the young ladies of the subsidized theatres, the Government actresses, you know."

Mag spoke French with a surprising ease, which revealed, even more than her general bearing, a thorough knowledge of Paris. She even affected, except in the presence of her employers, a deep understanding of modern argot. There remained nothing

German about her speech, except the habit of laying unusual stress on certain syllables. Thus she pronounced the word Government—*Góvernment*.

"Here's the business in a nutshell," she continued. "Besides the little Louie, the Corbelliers have a booby of a boy, that they can make nothing of, good-looking enough, and not a bit stupid, but just as much a ninny and a slacker as his mother. Besides, he is like her in another thing, he prefers the society of men. This fine young fellow imagines that he has a gift for music. He plays the guitar, the zither, and the banjo and a whole heap of other instruments which show off the shape of his hands. He even attempted the harp but that was too much for him. Just now he is quite mad about the mandoline and Italian songs, and as his mother humours him in everything she wants Louie's new governess to speak Italian so that her darling Jacques may profit by it."

In a lower tone, as though confidentially, she added: "You can palm off pretty well anything on her. Louie is governessed by her father more than by anybody else. . . . Yes, the *cocu*! He adores his daughter and doesn't care a rap for his wife or his son."

The three women made their way back to the office, and Madame Corbellier asked from the door: "Well, Mag, have they got what we want?"

Mademoiselle Esther consulted her register.

"I have a lady, a widow, a Frenchwoman, who speaks German very well and who is just leaving a situation in Rome."

"Oh, no, not a Frenchwoman!" cried Madame Corbellier with a gesture of repugnance as though a plague or a nihilist had been proposed. "A German

by preference, or failing that an Italian speaking German."

At this moment two black silhouettes, two poor silhouettes, feminine at all events, the wanness of Paris in their faces, the anxiety of ill-luck in their eyes, glided uncertainly into the office from outside. Intimidated by the ladies with their rich furs and expensive hats, they scarcely dared to speak.

"What do you want?" asked Mademoiselle Esther coldly.

"Places as maids," murmured one of the two.

"At the bottom of the courtyard, to the left. Staircase B."

"Ah, you provide maids also?" said Madame Corbellier.

A little uneasily she watched the two black silhouettes as they crossed the courtyard, bending their spines as if they felt themselves being pursued by aggressive eyes.

"Oh, in exceptional cases, and only with the very highest references."

Mag, however, had made her way behind the office chair, and began turning over the register. "Who is this?" she asked, indicating a name on a page.

Mademoiselle Esther leaned forward, and read out loud, "Alexandrine Ceroni . . . she's an Italian. . . . Yes, born in the suburbs of Trieste, she is registered as speaking German and a little English; she came yesterday. . . . I was not making the entries at the time. She has taken a room here."

"I knew an 'Alessandra'," observed Mag, "a governess in an American family. It was at Abbazia that I knew her. . . . Oh, it must be nearly five years ago. She was quite young then; she was a governess

with some people named Bruston. Is the one you have here very pretty?"

"I can't say that," said Mademoiselle Esther, "I haven't seen her yet."

The magic of the words, "Is she very pretty?" had attracted the attention of Madaric Corbellier, of Josette and even of Louie. Mag, who was looking out of the window into the courtyard, cried out: "But there she is! That's Sandra, all right."

A tall young girl, supple in every limb, with the head of a Perugino madonna, dressed in a plain blue costume and wearing a shiny yachting cap, quite out of fashion and out of season, came gravely down the steps of the main building and made her way towards them. The German ran to meet her; they could be seen greeting and embracing each other. They talked for a few seconds.

"She really is very beautiful," said Josette.

Emmeline did her the honour of using her double eye-glass.

"She would have to be dressed properly," she observed. "She is very badly turned out, that girl. But what a splendid type!"

"This is my friend, Sandra Ceroni," said Mag, bringing her into the office and introducing her with assurance.

The Italian bowed without a smile, without a word. Seen near, she was even more beautiful, with an almost majestic figure, a forehead smooth under sumptuous coils of black hair, very glossy, her pure, rather heavy face lit up by large dark eyes.

"You speak Italian, Mademoiselle?" Emmeline questioned.

"Si, Madame; it's my mother tongue. But I am

an Austrian subject. I know German as well as Italian."

"You have an accent in French."

"I know, Madame, . . . I have never been in France before. But I know thoroughly French grammar and orthography. I have all my diplomas."

"And you, Mag? Do you know this young girl?"

"I can recommend her to you, Madame, as if it were myself. Sandra tell Madame at once that you have a very pretty voice and are a musician."

But Madame Corbellier did not give the Italian time to sound her own eulogy. She burst out, "So you sing? you are a musician? Why couldn't you say so before? You will suit me absolutely. How delighted Jacques will be! Didn't I say that you are to teach a little Italian to my eldest son? Well, well, it seems to me that all that can be arranged." She glanced at the platinum watch strapped to her wrist. "Three o'clock already, how late all this has made me! And I had any number of things to do this afternoon! Can you come to see me to-morrow morning at my house, 26 Rue Montaigne, . . . Mademoiselle . . . Mademoiselle . . ."

"Sandra," completed the Italian in her grave voice.

"Mademoiselle Sandra . . . a pretty name isn't it, Josette? To-morrow about eleven o'clock. We will discuss the terms then. You are free from now on?"

"Si, Madame," and then correcting herself, "Yes, Madame."

"Are there any formalities to go through?" Madame Corbellier inquired of Mlle. Esther.

"It was Mag who answered."

"Sandra will do what is necessary in regard to the Grillon."

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"That's all right, then. We must be starting. I'm dreadfully late. Good afternoon. We shall meet to-morrow."

She drew up her chinchilla scarf and hurried out of the office, thoroughly tired out by the effort that this business had cost her. It was only on reaching the street outside that she gave a thought to Loute.

"Tell me, do you like her, little one?"

Loute pouted.

"We shall learn Loute's opinion, when she has given it to her father," remarked Josette. "Isn't that so, Loute?"

Loute smiled, disclosing uneven, overlapping but sound teeth. Madame Corbellier shrugged her shoulders.

"Denys," she said to the chauffeur; "drop me at the Magasins du Louvre. Then, Mag, you can have the car for an hour to take these young Ladies to Madame Haumont-Segré's."

"What about the tickets for the Institut de Belles-Grâces?" asked Josette.

"You can take them at the Concordia on your way, before going to Madame Haumont-Segré's."

The hats and the furs were re-installed in the Havana-coloured limousine. As soon as they had started, Madame Corbellier expressed her delight. She had the habit of expressing current ideas in obvious phrases, but with authority as if each phrase ingeniously translated a really new thought.

"What an excellent institution that '*Grillon*' is!" she said. "Now that's a really useful work! I can see why the Embassies patronize it. How much more practical foreigners are than we! You may be quite sure that France has nothing like it in the other

countries. You must speak about it to your father, Josette; he has so much influence. Young governesses run ever so many risks in a great city where they arrive without knowing a single soul, don't they, Mag?"

Mag gave a subtle smile, one of those smiles directed towards one's inner depths, which respond not to what one has just heard, but to some involuntary recollection.

"Yes, Madame, a great many risks."

The little, yellowish eyes of Loute, always attentive or prying, watched in turn her mother and the governess. Josette had obviously nothing to do with the conversation and her pretty face was clouded by some intimate anxiety of her own. Madame Corbellier continued indefatigably:

"Your friend made an excellent impression on me, Mag. Where did you say that you knew her?"

"At Abbazia, Madame. She was with the Brustons, an American family. As for me," she hesitated imperceptibly, "I . . . I . . . was finishing the education of Mademoiselle Osmondo."

"She has real beauty, but how badly she is dressed! And that shiny yachting cap! Where in the world did she get hold of that? All the same it's a fact that the Italians don't know how to dress—even the *grandes dames*, just look at the Marchioness Pizzocanti, what a sight she is! Nevertheless, my good Mag, I am exceedingly obliged to you. You must thank Madame Croze for lending you to me for this visit to the 'Grillon.' Now this matter of a governess which was bothering me so, is quite settled. One can't take too many precautions when it's a matter of

choosing the person to whom one is going to confide one's own daughter."

Loute again caught that subtle half smile as it floated from one feature to another of the German's face. But Madame Corbellier, who had made this declaration with self-satisfied assurance, observed nothing and remained convinced first of all that she had expended a great deal of energy and perspicacity in procuring the services of Sandra Ceroni, secondly, that she had chosen Sandra Ceroni after mature investigation and under exceptionally safe conditions.

They had crossed the Seine by the Pont de la Concorde, and were passing along the Rue de Rivoli. They reached the Place du Palais Royale; Madame Corbellier got out of the car in front of the Magasins du Louvre at the corner of the Rue St. Honoré: doubtless a habit of hers, for no one expressed any surprise or offered to accompany her. The car, relieved of the hat with the white aigrette and the chinchillas, proceeded quickly along the Avenue de l'Opera, towards the boulevards. Mag had taken Madame Corbellier's place beside Josette: both of them were talking in a low tone in short broken sentences and in a mixture of German and French. Governess and pupil seemed to get on well together and to be willingly confidential on both sides. Loute, seated opposite on one of the folding seats, seemed to be staring obstinately out of the window.

The car turned to the left into the Place de l'Opera, where it had to wait for several minutes for permission to pass. Then it got away again and a few minutes later pulled up in front of the Concordia, a huge promenade music-hall that had recently been built at the corner of the Rue Caumartin and the boulevard.

Mag, Josette and Loute got out and were escorted at a short distance by the footman. Their absolutely correct appearance prevented any suggestion of unpleasantness as they made their way under the peristyle.

Mag's eyes lit upon a *chasseur* whose cap bore the word "Concordia" in silver letters.

"Where does one book tickets for the lectures of the Institut de Belles-Grâces?"

"At the ordinary booking-office, Madame, here, to the right."

The Institut de Belles-Grâces, which held its meetings in the hall of the Concordia every Thursday afternoon, with much trumpeting of prestige and success, was the result of the collaboration of a wide-awake journalist, a manager of cosmopolitan music-hall turns, and a manufacturer on a big scale of the liquid known as Kola. The journalist conceived the idea, and persuaded the manager and the manufacturer. The idea of lectures, after so many lectures, and at the same time as so many more, scarcely suggested genius in itself. Its originality consisted in this:—First of all, in giving the lectures in a place devoted to the most spicy and the most inane "revues": even now they were playing in the evening "Ta bouche, gamine!" and the advertisements over which Loute's glance wandered represented a dancer—the Sorelly—clothed almost entirely in a hair-net with large meshes, one limb and one breast naked, and who, while pirouetting, offered her lips to an invisible kiss. The second piece of ingenuity lay in asking only exceptionally well-known people to lecture, Parisians, men and women, whose photographs are exploited in the shop windows, or

better still whom caricature has made popular. They were paid without stinginess, and the speculation was a good one. The third inspiration of genius—the most inspired of the three—lay in turning upside down the specialities of the lecturers, in asking a professor of the Sorbonne to exhort on flirtation, a duchess to find fault with housekeeping, a divette to preach morality. Here was something attractive and new! Here was something that paid one for upsetting one's plans between 3.30 and 5 o'clock, for missing, according to one's age, a collective lesson, a tennis match or a rendezvous! One of the coming attractions was the turn of the divette: the advertisements of the Institut de Belles-Grâces fraternized, under the peristyle of the Concordia, with those of "Ta bouche, gamine!" and announced "Mademoiselle Bastinguette: How I should have wished to have been brought up:—a Lecture on Education," while the profile of this pretty little ape of a singer gave the cue to the provocative lips of the Sorelly. And the Paris of rich mothers and of young daughters under governesses was so intensely eager to see and hear Mademoiselle Bastinguette in the rôle of Madame de Maintenon or Madame de Genlis, that three weeks in advance, Mag arrived only just in time to book the twelve stalls for the Crozes, the Corbelliers and their friends, the Haumont-Manins, the Haumont-Segrés and for Ropart d'Anay, for whom she had undertaken the commission. After glancing at the plan of the hall, she obtained them as she wanted them in the third and fourth row, in sixes, one behind the other, after which she took two more, side by side, a little further back, in the triforium opposite.

While the German was choosing, paying for, and

sorting the tickets in her reticule, Loute Corbellier, after fully inspecting the walls of the peristyle, the advertisements, portraits and programmes, turned her attention to Josette, and made the discovery—which had also attracted the notice of the footman, and made his face pucker up slyly—that Josette was expecting the arrival of some one. All her graceful, motionless person was in expectation, from her eyes fixed on the bay of the peristyle to her heels that had been imperceptibly raised. Suddenly her cheeks flushed. Two young men leaving the boulevard, approached the entrance. Both were tall, but of quite different builds; one more thick-set, the type of a woman's man, with a rather large face, a short blonde beard, and with a suggestion of carelessness, not without elegance in his whole appearance. The other, less good-looking, more slender, clean-shaven, with the complexion of a sportsman, moulded, for the rest, on the English model which has been adopted by all the modern aristocracies of Europe, wore an immaculate tall hat, a loose jacket and a large single pearl in his tie.

The effect of their appearance on Josette electrified her immobility and she went up to Mag, whose elbow she clutched with a nervous gesture. . . .

"Mag! Here are Adolf and your friend."

The German closed her reticule and turned round. She saw Josette's face perturbed by anxiety and by happiness, and she saw the two new arrivals. Taking her pupil's arm, she went towards them without the slightest embarrassment. She shook hands with the young man with the fair beard, while the other bowed respectfully to Josette, who on her side was too agitated to utter a word.

"Josette," said Mag, "I want to introduce M. de Bolski, the well-known pianist, who is a friend of my childhood and also a friend of Count Adolf de Letzling, isn't he, Monsieur de Letzling?"

"We were at the University together," answered the clean-shaven young man.

Almost immediately Mag contrived to devote herself to the one whom she had introduced under the name of Bolski, leaving M. de Letzling and Josette a little on one side. And while they, when their embarrassment had gradually disappeared, commenced to talk in an undertone, but with that intimate exchange of looks which renders the control of the voice meaningless, Mag said to Bolski, speaking very quickly in German:

"Well, things are not going very well for the little one's marriage. Monsieur Croze, who was pleased enough at first to have his daughter marry a Count, has consulted his colleagues in the Cabinet. They have persuaded him that he would expose himself to attacks in the newspapers, if he accepted an Austrian military attaché as his son-in-law. The little one is very unhappy about it, for she is mad about Letzling."

"And he's mad about her," said Bolski with a smile.

"Ah, he will know how to love, that man," murmured Mag in a tone that had in it something of reproach and regret.

In spite of his careless elegance and his obvious want of correctness, there emanated from this Bolski an indefinable charm, very difficult to explain. Perhaps it came from the abundance of his curled hair, blond and turning a little grey above the

temper or from the amiability of his features, which contrasted so sharply with the almost insolent malice of his blue eyes. His mouth, scarcely concealed by the blond moustache, formed a drooping curve, in which the irony of his glance was repeated.

And upon this man the eyes of the woman who was speaking were fastened eagerly—not with that artless ecstasy of first passion, which at this moment was adorning with a yet deeper innocence Josette's charming features,—but rather with the amorous longing of a mistress who remembers. As for him, he allowed himself to be stared at, said very little in reply, but for all his attitude of ironical indifference, listened to Mag attentively.

"Without knowing anything definite," Mag continued, "Josette has got hold of the idea that she is perhaps going to be forbidden to meet Letzling. She is romantic, and all the more ready for any adventure, because, from a certain point of view, she is still only a child; yes, my dear, you needn't sneer, there are still some of them left. Of course I want to give her all the help I can, for she is charming, and then if she marries Letzling, she is going to keep me with her, with his consent."

"Yes," observed Bolski gravely, "they must marry." He hummed—

*"Protégeons leurs tendresses,
Aidons à leurs amours . . ."*

Then he added: "It's the best thing for them."

"And for us," Mag concluded. "Spare no pains to make yourself useful to Letzling," she continued, using the second person singular without noticing

that Loute, with ears alert, was prowling quite close to them. "Letzling is not ungrateful. How are things going with you?"

Bolski shrugged his shoulders without answering. And his glance became so threatening that the intrepid Mag did not dare to pursue the question. She contented herself with asking—

"Have you found the apartments?"

"Yes," said Bolski whose face now relaxed. "Something that will surprise you, and everything in order. Rue Saint Lazare."

"The kind I wanted?"

"Better than that. Imagine a suite of apartments that are duplicated, with another exit on . . ."

Mag stopped him with a gesture, she had just seen that Loute, while pretending to read a programme, was listening to them. She said very quickly and in a very low voice—

"Be careful, the kid understands a little German. You must write to me about all that. I have taken your ticket and Letzling's for the lecture, as we arranged. I will send them to you."

She then approached Josette and Letzling with Bolski.

"Josette, dear," she said, "it's time for us to be going on to the Haumont-Segrés'. We only have the car for another twenty-five minutes."

Loute now joined the group. The two men bowed to her, both of them embarrassed by the frigid perspicacity of the glance that she cast upon them. Then they took their leave. Mag, Loute and Josette returned to the car, followed by the footman, who on his side had missed nothing of the two scenes under the peristyle, and who was laughing inwardly as he

though how he would tell the story at supper in the servants' hall.

* * * * *

Monsieur and Madame Haumont-Segré, whose only daughter, Berthe, was receiving that day a few girl friends, according to the modern usage which accords in advance to young girls the habits and the obligations of women of the world, lived in the Rue Montalivet, in a house built under the Second Empire, at once ugly and convenient, and with quite a fine garden. The Bank (Haumont-Segré, successors of Segré and Haumont) was situated in the Rue de l'Echelle. "Quite among ourselves," Berthe Haumont-Segré had written on the cards that she sent to her friends. That signified that there would be at this intimate tea—besides Berthe's three cousins, Yvonne, Alice and Nanie, daughters of the professor at the College de France, Georges Haumont—called Haumont-Manin, in order to distinguish him from his brother—only Josette, Loute and perhaps the young Ropart d'Anays, a little girl and two boys, Josette's cousins, who lived at Val d'Anay, near Romorantin. Loute's brother, Jacques Corbellier, hardly ever took part in these family entertainments. On the other hand, Fanny, Berthe's English governess, a serious and rather good-looking woman of thirty, was admitted to them, as also was Mag, whose position in the Croze family was really exceptional. As for the mothers they were tolerated without any effort being made to insist on their presence.

As the Havana-coloured car was threading its way through the Rue Montalivet, it passed the three little Haumont-Manins, who, under the escort of their

mother, were making their way on foot to their cousin's house, after having travelled modestly in a motor-omnibus from their quarters in the Rue Palatine, behind St. Sulpice: three slender and erect figures, thoroughly "modern," followed by a plump lady. Yvonne and Alice, who had only a year between them, similar in figure, but not in face, were dressed alike in blue costumes and blue hats with scarves of imitation otter. Nanie, the youngest and the shortest, wore the same scarf of imitation otter, but her costume and hat, identical in cut with those of her elder sisters, were of beige. By contrasts such as this, Nanie, while getting on perfectly well with her sisters, expressed her own individuality.

Mag, Josette and Loute waited for them at the entrance. Kisses were exchanged; the charming laughter of young girls, who laugh just for the sake of laughing, spread through the group. Mag asked the plump lady, Madame Haumont-Manin, about the health of "M. le professeur."

"He's all right," said Madame Haumont-Manin. "He is finishing his book on the *Four Sons of Aymon*. One can't get a word out of him."

But the tone in which she pronounced these words contradicted their lack of ceremony, and beneath the plaits of grey hair, the whole of the lady's good, beaming and yet spirituelle face expressed tender admiration, and submission of her whole being to the works, the happiness and the fame of her great man.

She continued talking about him with the German, as she followed the young girls into the house. Three high French windows opened out of the drawing-room on to a rather large garden: through the bare branches of the trees the sun flashed its

waning splendour. At the end of the garden two tall boys and two young girls could be seen, racquets in hand, returning balls over a tennis-net.

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Madame Haumont, "one can play tennis out-of-doors in Paris at the end of January. We have no such thing as seasons now."

Berthe Haumont-Segré accompanied by her governess, Fanny Smith, who had both been watching the game, came quickly to meet the new arrivals. Berthe was a delicate blonde, tall and excessively fragile, who suggested the physical fashion of 1830, rather than that of 1913. As for Fanny Smith, who was rather too tall, rather too bony, her cheeks a little too ruddy, even those who refused to consider her good-looking united in recognizing her excellent manners. Dressed in a black tailor-made costume of the best cut with a muslin jabot in front and a large black felt hat on her head, she received the Haumont-Manins, Josette, Mag and Loute, rather as mistress of the house than as a paid subordinate.

"My sister-in-law is not in?" questioned Madame Haumont-Manin as she kissed Berthe.

It was Fanny who replied. "No, Madame has gone to consult Dr. Werner, that new nerve specialist. She has been out since lunch for three hours, I think she will be back soon."

In contradistinction from Mag, Fanny Smith preserved the strong accent of her race. She sounded no *r*. She pronounced "*uis*" "*ouis*," and when she said Madame has gone out for three hours, that signified that Mme. Haumont-Segré's absence had lasted three hours. And yet Fanny Smith had arrived from Buxton six years before and had spent these six

years in Paris, directing the education of Berthe. But as she always spoke English with her pupil, she made scarcely any progress, and displayed besides, on this point, the disdainful indifference of the Anglo-Saxon.

Correct, courteous, the two little Ropart d'Anays, Hector and Jean, respectively thirteen and fifteen years old, with their two tousled heads ruffled and perspiring, left their game in order to kiss the hand of Madame Haumont-Manin and the cheeks of their cousin, Josette.

"Good gracious, how damp you are," said the latter, laughing and wiping her cheeks.

Then came Henriette Ropart d'Anay, a girl of sixteen, so strong in appearance that she might have been taken for Hector and Jean's elder brother transformed into a girl. Behind her, a young person, scarcely older, with the face of a village girl, light-hearted and naïve, dressed simply in a brown skirt and a linen blouse and with her beautiful pale blonde hair waving freely, came forward hesitatingly with her racquet in her hand.

"Come, Mademoiselle, I want to introduce you to these ladies," Fanny Smith called out with an air of authority.

The girl obeyed, nervously, ashamed of her hair which was coming down, ashamed of the glow that she felt in her cheeks, embarrassed by all these unknown faces that were looking at her with such curiosity.

"This is Mademoiselle Henriette's new governess," said Fanny Smith. "She has only been at Val d'Anay for the last fortnight. She is from Arlon in Luxemburg."

The English woman gave the surname and the

Christian name; in the latter "Rosalie" was more or less distinguishable, but the surname remained wholly unintelligible.

"What is her name?" Loute Corbellier asked Henriette Ropart d'Anay in a low voice.

"Boisset, Rosalie Boisset," answered Henriette in the same tone. "She has lost her father and mother. Mama got her address from the Employment Institution for Orphans. . . . You know, the Institution, that they hold a lottery for every year. She is a nice person and doesn't worry one. We get on very well together. And she is strong, my dear, we wrestle sometimes, the two of us together, and she has me on the ground in two minutes!"

Rosalie Boisset, becoming more at ease, gave Madame Haumont-Manin and Josette the news from Val d'Anay.

"Why didn't my aunt come with you?" asked Josette.

"Oh, Mademoiselle, Madame can't leave the twins."

The twins were two late arrivals, Marguerite and Violette, born the previous year to the Ropart d'Anays, who were already provided with three children.

"They are such darlings," Rosalie said, as she described them. "They are so alike that you can't tell one from the other. Two almonds in the same shell."

She had a very slight accent, hardly noticeable, and one that would be taken for provincial rather than for foreign. Fanny Smith interrupted her—

"Come, children," she said to the tennis players, "you mustn't catch cold. As soon as the sun goes

down we shall feel the winter again. Mademoiselle Rosalie, will you take them to tidy themselves up a little in the dressing-room beside the school-room—I showed it to you—and then they can come down and have tea with us. . . . Berthe."

Berthe, whom Josette had taken aside down one of the garden paths, stopped abruptly.

"Aren't you coming?" said the Englishwoman with an imperious note in her voice.

"In a minute; I have something to say to her," Josette answered drily, as she placed a hand on the arm of her friend, who was already anxious to turn back.

Fanny Smith did not insist, but the flush on her cheeks deepened, and her lips framed words that she did not utter. They all went towards the house where tea was served. Josette and Berthe alone waited a few moments in the garden; the twilight was rapidly deepening over the paths. Both were gossiping intimately, their arms interlaced, Berthe with lowered head, Josette animated, gesticulating.

"He ' will be here, at the latest at half-past five," said Josette. "He will leave the Sorbonne earlier, before the end of the lecture. And you must try to be a little nice to him. He loves you so much! He never stops talking to me about you. Don't be influenced by that demon of a Fanny, who, naturally, will put off your marriage as long as she can."

"But I assure you . . ."

"Bah, bah, I've got eyes, you know. Fanny monopolizes you; you listen to her far more than to your father and mother, and you make a mistake. Perhaps she is a superior woman, but she is consulting her own interests and not yours. And then, actually to

prefer Mademoiselle Fanny Smith to my brother Guy! Oh! you silly girl! If I were in your place! Only to have to lift up your finger to marry the man who loves you!"

She gave a melancholy sigh which seemed out of place in one so alive with the spirit of youth.

"The M. de Letzling affair isn't going well?" Berthe asked.

"Oh, on Adolf's side it is going all right. Only, poor boy, as he is afraid of putting Papa out by coming to see us too often, we scarcely ever meet each other except at balls. Mag is very good in helping us. . . . Just now I was able to talk a second with him under the peristyle of the Concordia, while Mag was taking the tickets for the lecture. On Tuesday we caught a glimpse of each other in the distance at the Opera. That's what we're reduced to now! And all this is because there is a Triple Alliance and my father wants to be Minister of War. What bad luck . . . !"

She was laughing with tears in the corners of her eyes. All of a sudden she cried out—

"Here's my brother."

A young man, rather below middle height, muscular, looking like a sportsman, but carefully dressed, appeared on the top of the steps. His clean-shaven face gave him an Anglo-Saxon appearance; but if this oval and yet full face had been finished off by a moustache and a pointed beard, it would have reproduced exactly the classical type of Frenchmen of the Middle Ages. He came down the steps towards the two girls. Seen closer, he produced a favourable impression by his pleasing, serious and frank look. He was preparing for the degree of Doctor of Science

at the Sorbonne, and in the Crozes' huge house in the Parc Monceau, he would work for long hours in a laboratory that had been specially fitted up for him.

Berthe's delicate face lit up.

"Good-afternoon, Berthe, good-afternoon, Jo."

He brushed Josette's cheek with his lips and kissed Berthe's hand. She made a little resistance, saying: "Take care, they might see."

"Is it a sin, then?" Guy Croze asked with a laugh.

"You see quite well that she is afraid of Fanny," said Josette.

As she pronounced this name, the Englishwoman's voice, controlled but distinctly annoyed, sounded from the top of the steps—

"Well, Berthe, is this the way you receive your friends?"

"I'm coming, I'm coming," answered Berthe; and without waiting to see if Josette and her brother were following, she ran towards the house.

Guy stood for a moment where he was, motionless and gloomy. Josette, who was a little taller than he, passed her arm round his neck.

"Don't worry, Guy. She is very fond of you all the same. Didn't you notice how she blushed with pleasure when you came?"

"Yes," said Guy, "but there's the governess, and it's she who runs the show. What is the matter with them all here, that they allow themselves to get under the spell of this hag of an Englishwoman?"

They made their way slowly back to the drawing-room where the lights were lit around a table of richly varied delicacies. Josette pointed out to her brother Yvonne Haumont-Manin, who was watching them from the doorway. She murmured—

"There is a girl who would not make you suffer, and who would have the courage to go her own road. You know that she loves you. And she is prettier than Berthe. She's worth a hundred of her both in head and in heart, and she isn't encumbered by a Fanny Smith."

"That's true," said Guy, "but what is one to do? I find her charming . . . but when I don't see her, I never think about her at all."

* * * * *

After having been put down in front of the Magasins du Louvre, the "beautiful Madame Corbellier" (as the newspapers that were friendly towards the Government expressed it in their official reports) had ostensibly made her way into the huge and noisy building. In the interests of actuality she went so far as to purchase from the nearest counter a packet of hair-pins, labelled "neiges." Then, judging that the time necessary for the Havana-coloured car to turn and to be out of sight of the door had elapsed, she went out of the exit that opened on to the Rue Saint-Honoré, plunged into the Rue des Bons-Enfants, and, turning immediately to the left in the midst of this maze of ancient hovels, so disconcerting in the very heart of Paris, emerged into the Rue de Valois. After a few paces she passed through the door of the dismal building which carries in gold letters, under a flag faded and soot-soiled, the pompous inscription, "Under-Secretary of Fine Arts." As one familiar with the place, she ascended without asking her way (but not without stopping several times to take breath), the two flights of the wide stone staircase which lead up to the Under-Secretary's office. She passed through the first

vestibule, and as soon as she had entered the ushers' hall, the head of that fraternity came towards her, and even before she could announce the object of her visit, said to her in a low voice and in a tone at once confidential and patronizing—

"Monsieur, the Under-Secretary, is engaged for the moment. But if Madame will come into the private sitting-room . . ."

"Certainly, Morguet. . . ."

Morguet went in front of her, not towards the immense hall, where congregate the small fry of those who clamour for fame, the emaciated seekers after State orders, but to the room adjoining the Under-Secretary's office.

"Madame Corbellier will find here on the large table *L'Illustration*, the *Revue de Paris*, the *Gaulois*;" and bowing with that air of self-important obsequiousness which the necessities of his position develop in every ministerial usher, he added from the door—

"Monsieur, the Under-Secretary has still more of them for a few moments."

Alone in this room with its brown and gilt wood-work, from which one's glance fell upon the interesting perspective of the Palais Royale, Emma Corbellier did first of all what every woman would have done in her place: she approached the looking-glass which hung over the mantelpiece, and satisfied herself as to the arrangement of her hat with its white aigrette, her hair, and her chinchilla scarf. After this, as the glass, being too high up, only showed her bust, she noticed that the panels of the door were fitted with a cheval glass in the fashion of Louis XVI, and hurried to see the reflection of her figure. Never

could she resist the desire to see the reflection of her complete figure, and this was not, as with so many others, from motives of self-admiration. And now, as she approached this other self framed by the *chambrante*, she knew that she was going to experience once more the shock of a hidden grief. Emmeline Corbellier could not console herself for being continuously, surely, invaded by that scourge, dreaded by women of to-day as much as small-pox was by our grandmothers—stoutness.

As a young girl at the time when she lived with her father, the head accountant in the Corbellier works, in one of the houses reserved for the higher employees, and went every day to Paris to take her singing lesson (she was preparing for the Conservatoire), it was just this pretty figure, even more than her fresh mouth and her *blond cendré* hair, that made men look at her: a figure a little *ponette*, a little developed above and below the narrow waist, which contrasted by its slimness with all this opulence. It was her pretty figure that had aroused first the notice, then the admiration, and later the passion of the shy son of the house, that timid Maurice Corbellier, just twenty-two years old, of whose longing and sad eyes, set in a thin face with a colourless beard that he kept twisting in his left hand—she used to catch passing glimpses through the office window on the ground-floor. Having become Madame Maurice Corbellier, she preserved her girlish outline during the first three years of marriage, though her face became even more beautiful through the content and leisure, and also through that luxury of the toilette which only money permits. After the birth of Jacques, towards her twenty-seventh year,

she began imperceptibly to develop contours. The chin became more and more flabby, the tops of the arms plumper. But she gained more admiration for that, particularly in the evening. Her bare shoulders were superb, and her waist, perhaps a little more sheathed in the armour of her corset, preserved the slenderness of her girlhood. And this lasted for years, for more than ten years, even after the birth of Louie, even after her meeting with the young Deputy, Croze, one summer at the waters of Mont Dore, a fateful meeting which in the course of a single month had brought the coquettish, but chaste Emmeline to the abyss of love and infidelity. In spite of her sin, she remained vaguely religious and sometimes she used to tell herself that this was a punishment for her sin, this slow coarsening of her natural form by the invincible enemy, who little by little had enlarged her face, puffed out her cheeks, and increased her waist; who now was harnessing her shoulder-blades with a double cushion, and without intermission was rolling around her bust soft creases covered again with flesh that had lost its first freshness.

"And yet, how I have struggled!" Emmeline would say to herself. She had, indeed, tried the infallible remedies of the feminine journals, the soaps, the salts in the bath, the cachets of poison for making one thin; she had submitted to electric treatment, to vibratory massage, to all sorts of gymnastics; she had consulted every beauty specialist; she had believed in their treatment; she was convinced that she had followed out their directions. Nothing would have made her confess that she had always evaded the different *régimes*, quite incapable as she was of a

sustained, whole-hearted conflict with her too genuine inclinations—gluttony and laziness. Gluttony for cakes, for sugared tea, buttered scones, syrupy liqueurs. Laziness in regard to all physical movement which rendered useless every effort of therapeutics through physical exercise, for Emmeline would stop short the moment that she became conscious of effort. Like so many of her kind, her *embonpoint* could only have been removed after the fashion of a cyst, by the use of the knife while she was under chloroform and while the only demand for energy required of her would have been the words, "Send me to sleep."

But she suffered from her physical deterioration which was increasing horribly at the dreaded turning-point of forty. With a Clairvoyance, singular in a woman who, for the most part, saw nothing around her, who accepted ready-made opinions, and was without the faintest shadow of critical intelligence, she did not allow herself to be imposed upon by the "beautiful Madame Corbellier" of the Government papers, nor by the good-natured assurances of Croze, who, for peace's sake, guaranteed that she had never been more attractive in her life. She believed only in the mirrors, questioned a hundred times a day with endless anxiety. And her bird-like memory, infallible in regard to this one object, brought back to her faithfully all the successive Emmelines that she had thus regarded in the course of years, from the little Conservatoire pupil, slight and yet plump, to the round and brisk *ponette* of Mont Dore, up to the massive body of the week before, less massive, it seemed to her, than she whose desolating reflection the looking-glasses of the official salon were reflecting

at this very moment. . . . In front, thanks to the artifice of the modern corset, thanks to the lines of the scarf adroitly manipulated so as to lengthen the figure, the illusion was possible : a lady, a little heavy, as the dressmakers say, a little short, too, but young-looking and still quite worth dressing elegantly. The real hopelessness was seen in profile ; the rounded back, the thickness of the waist, that ensemble as of a pyramid common to so many women of this age, the comic effect of which is still further accentuated by their enormous hats. Emmeline persisted in looking at herself in this way, as if she were actually pleased in the midst of her distress. And from the depths of this distress, there rose a thought which tortured her : "It's impossible, impossible, that he does not see me just as I am."

He was the jolly, sympathetic, brusque companion, the hard-working friend, at once intelligent and easy-going, the sounds of whose gay voice she heard at this very moment through the door, although it was doubled by a sash lined with cushions, which separated the salon from the Official Cabinet. As this voice came nearer the door, Emmeline quickly left her improvised mirror and sat down in one of the majestic armchairs which stood in rows along the walls. Suddenly roused out of her own sad anxiety, she tried to hear what was being said on the other side. The padded leaf of the folding-door had just been opened ; they were talking in the doorway ; a woman's chatter, high-pitched, interrupted by little artificial laughs, alternated with the facetious and commonplace replies of the Under-Secretary. The words were indistinguishable ; but has not the pitch of human speech, when an impassioned mood accentuates it, a significance

quite as clear as the syllables actually pronounced? The voice of the Under-Secretary was "showing off" and though laughing, obviously endeavouring to charm. Emmeline knew this voice of passion, this changed voice, pretending to be ironical, the voice of an eager, impatient, full-blooded man who seeks to make himself at once witty and gallant. . . . With whom? Some low woman again! Oh, how she hated just now the political good fortune of her friend! of which, up to this moment, she had been so proud, which had brought her, her personally, so many respectful acknowledgments—as the dispenser of theatrical engagements, red ribbons, pensions, missions and honours—but which, on the other hand, exposed Croze to the insolent ambition of official *comédiennes*, and assailed his forty-six years with sheep's eyes, perfumes, gew-gaws, the ceaseless offer of youthful *bonnes fortunes* in exchange for those official favours, so easy to distribute without any supervision, without its being known, even to the friend of eleven years who was faithful to her adultery as to a second marriage, and faithful this time of her own free will. And, undoubtedly, Croze remained as affectionate towards her, as tender, as eager as formerly; he cared only for her—that was certain—she remained the durable affection of his life, blended with the recollection of the double essence of his youth and his political triumphs. But with the same acuteness that she brought to the estimation of her figure, she realized that he was becoming less and less a lover. When he was with her, he wilfully exaggerated the reasons for carefulness and moderation that middle age demands. He would say with a smile of affectionate renunciation, "At my age!" She sus-

pected that he kept his age only for her just now—and that elsewhere he would be winning enough to disguise it, that elsewhere he would frisk, coquet, conquer. And yet she did not know which to complain of most, the evil destiny that robbed her successively of all the weapons of her beauty, or the ministerial chance that surrounded with light and provocative women the friend whom she always loved passionately—at the very moment when she felt herself every day less seductive, less a woman. . . .

“Well, we shall see, if you are very, very good!”

A short silence follows. “What is going on?” Emmeline asks herself and the door opens, ushering out the slim form, the dazzling beauty, the twenty years of a young girl, correctly, elegantly dressed in beige cloth with a white veil, a black hat with many feathers, and a sable boa.

Emmeline catches the sound of the laughing adieux, and imagines to herself the parting glances. Then, as soon as Croze has seen her, his face changes, becomes strained, annoyed, and his voice has all of a sudden become official again, with a note of fatigue in it—

“All right, all right, Mademoiselle, all that shall be carefully attended to. Au revoir.”

The actress, a pensioner of the Français, who is looking forward to her first “lead” crosses the diagonal of the huge waxed floor with the step of a *grande amoureuse* who is careful about her exit, while the Under-Secretary runs up to Emmeline with outstretched hands.

“Dear one, I didn’t understand it was you who was waiting for me! That wretched Morguet! Forgive me. Come into my office, please.”

A few minutes later, here is the picture enframed in the Under-Secretary's brown and gold cabinet:

Emmeline Corbellier is buried in the moleskin-coloured armchair near the desk. She has raised her veil; she has just stopped sobbing, sobs which have gradually brought relief, while the Under-Secretary, seated near her on a revolving chair, holds her right hand and kisses it devotedly, repeating with affectionate impatience—

"Come, it's all over, isn't it? The big grief has gone, hasn't it? One little smile, just to show that it is all over!"

Yes, it is over, or at least it is on the verge of being so. A fit of jealousy aroused by the exit of the *comédienne* is appeased as usual by the kind words of the lover by the: "But I was laughing at that little goose, besides she has no talent!" and the: "If you knew to what extent there is room only for you in my life." Comforted by the presence and the contact of the one man that she loves, Emmeline begins once more to think that tears disfigure her by puffing up and moistening the wrinkles of her face. She dabbed her eyes, quickly passed a tiny powder puff over her cheeks, straightened her hair and smiled. And in his turn, Croze laughed, delighted that the scene had been so short, embraced his visitor with the fervour of a school-boy which, however, was suddenly cut short by the appearance of Morguet, the man with the silver chain who brought a bundle of papers for signature.

When they were once more by themselves, Emmeline, quite herself again, leaned on the roll-top desk opposite Croze.

"Do you know that I have unearthed a splendid

Italian teacher . . . a perfectly reliable girl . . . at the 'Grillon' . . . you know, the place where Julie got Mag . . . (Julie is Madame Croze). But what trouble I have had! I've had to go with Mag and Josette right to the other end of Grenelle. But you're not listening to me." •

"Yes," answered Croze, whose face had clouded at the name of his daughter. "What did you do with Josette after this visit to the 'Grillon'?" •

"I sent her on in my car with Mag and Louie to Berthe Haumont-Segré's where there is a little tea."

"I hope that Herr Graf von Letzling will not be at this tea?"

"Certainly not! He never goes to the Haumont-Segré's. But, good heavens! what a fuss you make about this little flirtation, the most innocent in the world, and one, too, that is already ancient history."

Croze rose quickly to his feet—

"I attach the importance to it that it deserves. . . . From the time that the newspapers—deuce take them!—began to announce this absurd marriage, there has not been a day in which I have not been attacked in the Moderate Press. To-day, even the *Débats*, a journal that pretends to be serious, gives me a little spiteful reminder under this heading." (He looked through his papers for the number without finding it). "'Croze the Austrian,' compares me to Louis XVI, to Napoleon. . . . *Tu felix Austria, nube*. . . . The wit of a pedant, the product of the École Normale . . . filthy libel. As for that wretched Squireen, I don't wish Josette even to meet him just at this time when there is talk of me for the War Office."

"You, to be Minister of War?" exclaimed Emme-

line, with a depth of feeling that really could not have been expected from her for a piece of news so entirely political.

"No, not Minister. But here are the facts, and very few people know them yet. An Under-Secretaryship is being created, and they might give it to me, and you know an Under-Secretary for War is a very different matter from an Under-Secretary of Fine Arts. Of course, this annoys the Moderates, who are stupid enough to persist in fighting me as though I were an anarchist. They support Berger, who drew up the Naval estimates."

"Berger, I know him, he's quite nice."

"Nice enough, but an out and out Moderate."

"But aren't you a Moderate, too?"

"A Moderate, a Moderate? No, I'm not a Moderate. I want the country to go forward in the sense of the future; I want no political crawfish. But for all that in my division, have I not always upheld honourable people? Do they worry Catholics at Romorantin? Has not even my marriage given them the best of guarantees, a Mademoiselle de Sauzon, from the heart of the most re-actionary and clerical part of the country—my good Julie, who is all piety and charity, the benefactress of all the cassocks in the place. . . ."

"My good Julie" was, as already explained, Madame Croze, and they both spoke of her for a moment with an affectionate unconsciousness that was thoroughly bourgeois.

She was scarcely embarrassing, the good Madame Croze, *née* Julie de Sauzon, sister-in-law of Baron Ropart d'Anay. Not at all stupid, on the contrary, firm and determined, but so absolutely confident in

her husband that even the most circumstantial, anonymous letters had never been able to shake her faith in him! And neither Croze nor Emmeline suspected that Julie's confidence was so intimately joined to her wifely love, that the day on which she lost it, that wifely love would die with it.

At this time she was suffering from the after consequences of phlebitis. Emmeline asked anxiously after her health, and Croze declared that it was satisfactory, but that a long period of rest was necessary.

"I shall go to see her to-morrow, without fail," said Emmeline.

"That's right. She was complaining of being neglected by her friends."

And reverting without transition to the subject that preoccupied him—

"All this wrangling makes little difference to me," he went on, "I shall get to the Rue Saint-Dominique in spite of everything, but you don't see the Under-Minister of War marrying his daughter into the Triple Alliance. . . . At this period of enraged Chauvinism. . . . Hullo!"

The telephone sounded on the superintendent's table. Emmeline remained motionless in front of him as Croze took up the receiver.

"Yes, it is I. . . . Good-morning, Tuillier. . . . Certainly, certainly, I am coming now, this instant."

He hung up the receiver hurriedly, and still standing, said—

"The President of the Council has summoned me. I believe, as they say in Montmartre, that this is going to be a bit of the fat!"

"What good luck!"

Emmeline's delight amazed Croze.

"Does that give you pleasure?"

"Of course, since it gives it to you."

"I warn you," demurred Croze with a smile, as he took from a large cupboard, his overcoat, hat, walking-stick and gloves, "I warn you that you won't be able to come any more and invade me all of a sudden as you do here. Up there things are serious. . . . I shall be surrounded by people with shoulder-knots."

"That's all the same to me."

Ready to go out, he embraced Emmeline, and then, pressing against him lingeringly, she murmured—

"I prefer people with shoulder-knots to low actresses."

Croze burst out laughing, kissed her again, then pushed her familiarly out of the door, which so recently had seen the exit of the pensioner of the Français.

"Ring me up before dinner," Emmeline urged, "so that I may know what the President has said to you."

"Certainly I will, and now my little Line, you must really hurry off."

"Rue Montaigne, as quickly as possible," Emmeline said to the footman, as she entered her car after having passed once more through the Magasins du Louvre.

The motor dashed along the Rue Saint-Honoré. But no sooner had it passed the Place du Palais Royale than Madame Corbellier spoke through the tube to the driver—

"Stop at Saint Roch!"

She wished to put a wax taper before the Virgin in that chapel, so still and hallowed, which lies at the very extremity of the church behind the high altar,

so as to have Croze nominated as Under-Secretary of War.

And as she had a soul devoid of baseness, she proposed to Providence a combination that would please everybody : Croze for War, Berger for the Fine Arts. And then and there; she placed two wax candles before the Virgin.

CHAPTER •II

THE DOUBLE SUITE

As already arranged with Mag, Sandra Ceroni passed the concierge without any questions, and made her way through the vaulted entrance of the old house which bears the number 67a, near the church of the Trinity in Rue Saint Lazare. She crossed the first court, turned to the left under a second arch, and entered a hall where there was a broad old-fashioned staircase of polished wood. Here she hesitated; two single-leaf doors of imitation mahogany stood at right angles to each other, facing the entrance. Which should she ring at? The Italian rummaged in her reticule and drew out a little note-book which she consulted thoughtfully. A fortnight in Emmeline Corbellier's service had been sufficient to metamorphosize her. She was now dressed like a Parisian. But the slow grace of her hereditary gestures contrasted with all the artificiality that had been imposed upon her from outside; and the classical beauty of her figure revealed itself under those artifices which are intended to make all feminine figures more or less alike.

After taking her bearings, she rang three times at the door nearer the staircase, and almost at once it opened.

"Twelve o'clock striking! what punctuality! You are the first arrival."

Mag and Sandra greeted each other in a little ante-chamber that was rather dark.

"Shall I keep my hat on?" asked the Italian.

"Come and take it off in the bedroom."

After passing through the antechamber they entered a sitting-room which was dimly lighted by a single window, with a blind and *brise-bise* looking out on to the court. Sandra, however, noted the tasteful elegance of the hangings and the furniture; a table laid for four, a little round table, on which was a fine table-cloth, whereon a spiny lobster fraternized with cold meats and cakes, while soaked in a bucket of ice, champagne and Rhine wines were also waiting.

"Madonna! Is all this for us?"

"Certainly. Did you think that I meant you to fast? Come and take off your hat."

The bedroom was small, too, and even darker than the sitting-room. Mag switched on the electric light, and they could see a broad bed, a few pretty specimens of Empire furniture in citron wood, and a few bronzes. In one corner, a bookcase containing some nicely-bound books, occupied a whole panel.

"The dressing-room is here," said Mag, as she opened a door. The electric light streamed down on the porcelain, on the nickel fittings, on the unframed bevelled glasses.

"What luxury!" said Sandra gaily, after placing her unpinned hat on the bed. "But in whose house shall we be? Tell me?" And immediately correcting herself, "In whose house are we?"

"In mine," said Mag.

"Oh!"

"You don't believe it. You're right there, I'm much too hard up to treat myself to rooms like these. And you haven't seen them all yet. There's another set."

"Where's that?"

"Look for it. It opens into here, into this very room."

"I can only see two doors . . . one to the sitting-room and the other to the dressing-room."

"There is a third."

She went up to the bookcase and took hold of a volume by the back. The book, turning on a hinge, fell flat on the shelf, and disclosed a door knob; Mag turned the knob and pushed gently. The whole bookcase followed the door and there was disclosed another room of similar size, simply, but quite nicely furnished, another dressing-room, another vestibule. Sandra gave a slight shiver.

"It's not exactly comfortable here."

"The radiators are turned off. But just look for another instant." In the second vestibule Mag opened the hall door. Sandra saw the staircase, the entrance to another house. . . .

"One goes out that side into the Rue de Château-dun. Do you understand? Now let's get back quickly, or we shall catch cold."

When they had returned to the sitting-room where the table was laid, Mag laughed at Sandra who seemed lost in thought.

"What are you dreaming of, beautiful statue?"

"Really," said Sandra, "I understand nothing. Where are we? What is the meaning of this false door and this double exit?"

"Sit down and listen. I'll tell you while we are

waiting for Fanny and Rosalie, who are sure not to be here before half-past twelve. Up to last autumn, this double set of bachelors' chambers had not been occupied, but only utilized, by a Frankfurter who made his fortune in chemicals, a certain Hausbinder. He was a bachelor and had a house in the Rue Bizet and a regular mistress. But he liked quiet little parties, caprices . . . you understand. And to shield himself at once from his mistress' jealousy and from any curiosity that might be dangerous, he arranged this—harem with two exits.”

“Is he dead?” asked Sandra.

“No, he had to go back to Frankfurt. His firm went to pieces in his absence. He sold his house and lost his mistress. And here, in this little temple of love, he has been succeeded by Bolski, his friend—and mine.”

She detached the “and mine” with a provoking boastfulness like a lover proud of naming her master, and this shamelessness made Sandra blush from head to foot.

“Then,” she said, “it’s here that you see him?”

“Wait a moment, the story isn’t quite so simple! Up till now, I have been seeing my friend in his rooms. We’ve known each other for years, I am from Koenigsberg, like him; he was fond of me when I was a kid. As long as he was rich I lived with him; you know that yourself, seeing that I was a bogus “Madame Bolski” when I met you at Abbazia. To-day, he is ruined; I make my living by selling Goethe and he makes his by selling Chopin. But with all our quarrels and experiments in separation from time to time, we know well enough that we belong to each other for life. Bolski is now living in

quite unpretentious furnished rooms on the boulevards, where he receives ~~the~~ ^{he}, but he is the University comrade and friend of Count Adolf de Letzling, the Austrian military attaché. Bolski, like Letzling, is of a noble family, and although in the Austrian service, Letzling has a fine fortune. Do you understand now?"

"Not in the least," replied Sandra.

"If you had lived only six months in Paris, you would have understood by now. Bolski is nominally the tenant, but Letzling pays the rent."

"In order to help Bolski?"

"Not at all. Of the two, the one under an obligation should be M. de Letzling, for by this means, without the slightest risk, he will be able to meet a young person, whom he is not allowed to meet elsewhere."

"Your pupil?"

"She herself. For the rest, Josette is a little *backfisch* who knows nothing whatever about love, I give you my word! She knows nothing, and dreams only of the good motive! But she must see her Letzling at any price. So I, who am of a compassionate nature, devote myself to her. I shall bring her here under my protection. Her attaché will meet her here."

"In your presence?"

"No, during these billings and cooings, I shall be receiving Bolski on the other side of the bookcase. I must fill in the time somehow, mustn't I? Josette and I will enter and leave together by the Rue St. Lazare. There is an antiquary under the arch, and he's a good excuse. Letzling and Bolski, on the other hand, will never enter except by the Rue de Châteaudun.

Finally, if they happened to surround our refuge, it is arranged that it is I who shall allow myself to be caught with Letzling, with Letzling, you understand, not with Bolski—in the one of the two sets of rooms which will have been ferreted out. And while I am thus sacrificing myself, Josette, under the escort of Bolski, will escape on the side that's clear. Isn't it a good plan?"

Sandra had listened to her friend's confidences with her usual seriousness. After being silent for some time, she murmured—

"How vicious it all is!"

"Undeceive yourself about that. There is not the least vice in my plan. The bookcase door will be closed, closed tight. Each couple will be in their own set of apartments. I can't promise you that Bolski and I will be content with touching the tips of each other's fingers. As for Letzling and Josette—I would bet anything that there will only be words between them, with a little kiss here and there. But then, my dear, it is our business, you know as well as I do, to make freedom and money out of the sins of our employers! Grasp that. *Werde kommt aber hier?* Didn't the door open?"

In her uneasiness the German sprang to her feet. At the same instant Fanny Smith, dressed completely in black with a mournful elegance that was rather puritanic, appeared, smiling discreetly, in the open doorway of the sitting-room.

"How the deuce did you get in?"

"Straight in by the door," answered the Englishwoman. "I thought you left it open for me on purpose."

"Not at all. It was Sandra here."

She threatened her in a friendly way with her finger, after which she introduced them—

"Mademoiselle Sandra Ceroni, who has been for the last fortnight with the Corbelliets—Mademoiselle Fanny Smith, the governess of Mademoiselle Berthe Haumont-Segré. You have not met each other before?"

"I have not had that pleasure," said the Englishwoman.

They shook hands and Fanny's eyes, of that opaque blue which is also clear as turquoise, and exceptionally penetrating, seemed to sum Sandra up from the deep coils of her hair to her large, perfectly-shaped feet.

"She is nice, the little maccaroni, isn't she?" Mag chaffed, with a look at Fanny, so excessively impertinent that, for all her coolness, the Englishwoman turned away. "My little Sandra," the German continued, "this beautiful lady in black is a model for us all, and I introduce to you a *governess* who knows what to do, as they say here."

"I know how to do what?" asked the Englishwoman, who understood slang imperfectly.

"I mean to say that in the house where you find yourself, you manage everybody. Father, mother and daughter are at your feet."

"Nonsense," said Fanny, "don't listen to her, Mademoiselle Sandra. I have a great affection for my pupil, Berthe; I believe that she returns it, and, as she is ever so much more intelligent than her father or her mother, she has control over them."

They escorted her to the bedroom to take off her hat. As she was placing it on the bed and at the same time straightening her carefully waved chest-

nut hair, three rings at the door summoned Mag. For the moment Fanny Smith was alone with Sandra. She turned again on her that fixed glance, and said—

"It is true that you are very beautiful, Mademoiselle."

Sandra made a grimace of semi-embarrassment, but Mag's return prevented her from replying. She brought Rosalie Boisset with her, and the new arrival was so pale and quivering with emotion, that for some seconds she pressed both hands against her ample bosom and was unable to utter a word. Mag shook with laughter.

"There's an innocent child for you! She was almost taken ill because the concierge called out to her while she was crossing the court and asked her where she was going. Come now kid, pull yourself together; she won't eat you up, the concierge! She has seen plenty of others. I'm going to introduce you to these ladies. But as a matter of fact, Fanny knows you. Now Sandra, this is Mademoiselle Rosalie Boisset, a charming young girl from Luxemburg, who for some little time has been attending to the education of Mademoiselle Ropart d'Anay, my pupil's cousin. She also attends to the domestic accounts of Madame Ropart d'Anay, the farm accounts of her husband, and the lessons of the little Ropart d'Anays. She doses the twins—and, in short, earns the admiration of the whole family."

"Oh, Mag!" put in Rosalie.

She was laughing now at her fright, and the rich tint of her blood lit up her honest cheeks. Fanny Smith examined with sympathetic curiosity the simple toilet of the newcomer, her ample skirt, not in the least in the fashion, her blouse of brown

silk, utterly provincial, cut low, and undisguisedly belonging to Madame Ropart d'Anay, and, beneath the felt hat, with a pathetic poverty of decoration, hair of a rather faded blond, common enough, but of an extraordinary abundance.

"Nice little girl," she observed in an undertone as if to herself. "Looks a baby."

"You see, I have chosen my guests for you, Fanny," Mag whispered in the same tone, and this time again Fanny remained silent.

"I've been so frightened," said the young Belgian, now re-assured, to Fanny. "That concierge with the beard ran after me, and said, 'Where are you going like that, Mademoiselle?' I suppose she thought that I wasn't well enough dressed for the front entrance. And I stammered out—I couldn't think of the name that Mag had told me to give, 'Madame Bolski.' When I did get the name out at last, the old witch became all sugar: 'Under the second arch to the left, Mademoiselle! Would you like me to come with you? No? My best respects to you, Mademoiselle.'" She mimicked comically the grimace and the curtsy of the hag, doubling herself up and holding the fold of her skirt between her fingers, as if for a minuet.

"Oh, what an amusing little thing you are!" exclaimed Fanny Smith, suddenly thawing.

And she kissed Rosalie on both her fresh cheeks which reddened more than ever.

"Come to lunch," said Mag, "it's striking one. I warn you that we shall have to wait on ourselves."

"Oh," burst out Rosalie, "I ask nothing better than to wait on you all three; do let me, Mag, please do."

"If you insist on it, little one," replied Mag. "It's

a regular mania with that kid; she must put herself out for the convenience of others. Ah, the Ropart d'Anays have more than value for their money."

As soon as Fanny, Sandra and Mag had taken their places at the table, Rosalie handed round the spiny lobster, and then poured out the iced Rhine wine into the amber-coloured glasses. She had really a natural gift for comic imitation, and one would have sworn that she had played this rôle of an energetic and sly waitress all her life. When the rest had been served she consented to sit down between Fanny and Sandra. Her lively and whole-hearted gaiety had immediately cheered up the guests. Even the Englishwoman lost something of her self-sufficiency.

Mag questioned her—

"You must tell me how you managed to get this afternoon off. In every situation, one has only to ask for a particular day for one's employer to declare that it is just on that day that one is quite indispensable."

"Oh!" said the Englishwoman, "I merely said that I was not lunching in the house; that's all."

"That's all," mimicked Mag, with a sneer. "That's all for you, my fine girl; I'd like to see you with my employer. In the first place, Mother Croze is extremely anxious about morality. In the interests of my virtue, she is afraid of my going out too often."

"Then how do you manage?"

"Fortunately, there is Josette, who is my ally. But you, Sandra, what trick did you play?"

The Italian girl in spite of the warm tints of her complexion, blushed easily. She had this blush on her face now, and she hesitated for a few seconds before replying, while the indefatigable Rosalie changed the plates and served out the cold meats.

"I asked for it through M. Jacques."

The eyes of both Mag and Fanny exchanged a glance of some little astonishment.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mag smiling, "so you have tamed Jacques Corbellier, have you? that's a record, that is, or rather, it's a conversion. Oh, don't look at me like that. If your eyes were loaded with bullets I should be killed at one shot. I only say what everybody says. It is quite possible that they exaggerate. Young Corbellier is a bad lot; I know all about it, because I've lived in Berlin. But if he finds you to his taste, and if he makes love to you, I give him back my good opinion. And you, little Rosalie, what fairy tale have you been telling the Baroness?"

"But . . . I told the truth. Once a week, I am sent to Paris for the Employment Institute for Orphans. Usually, the Baron comes with me, but just now he is taking part in a Congress of Free Schools at Blois, and I had to come all by myself. So I said I would lunch with you, Mag."

"At all events, you didn't tell them where?"

"No."

"Good! It's not worth blushing about. You're young in this business. You will learn that we must confide as little as possible of the truth to our employers on the subject of our doings. They have no right to know our lives, have they? If the Baroness asks you this evening, tell her that you lunched with me at the Bouillon Duval. And look here, give us some champagne; Mademoiselle Smith's glass is empty."

Rosalie jumped to her feet.

"Let me open it. At Val d'Anay, I always attend to the cellar. You'll see."

And she drew the cork noiselessly and without losing one frothy bubble, like a master-butler. She filled the glasses; Sandra and Mag sipped theirs, the Englishwoman, having emptied hers, murmured—

“Very nice champagne; very dry.”

“It was chosen by Bolski; he’s a good judge,” said Mag. “It’s he who is giving us this lunch.”

“Shall we see M. Bolski?” asked Fanny Smith, whose cheeks were getting flushed, and who seemed gradually to be transformed into a new person with rough gestures and loud tones in her voice.

“Perhaps,” Mag answered evasively, “but later on.”

They ate for some time in silence. Rosalie attended zealously to the waiting. When the cold meats had been removed, all four of them nibbled at the fruits and cakes, tickling their palates with the piquante aroma of the wine. Rosalie, very red, her eyes sparkling, took her place between Fanny and Sandra once more. Suddenly she commenced to prattle with the babble of a child who has been kept up too late, and who has become excitable in the society of grown-up people.

“Certainly, I won’t tell where I lunched, nor that I drank champagne. The Baroness wouldn’t scold me. Oh, no, she is so nice. But she would be sorry. She would make me go through a whole heap of prayers with her. But on the contrary, I believe that I will tell the Baron. One can’t hide anything from him. He looks me right in the face, and says to me— ‘Rosalie, Rosalie, I see by your nose that you are telling me a fib.’ Oh, he’s inimitable, is the Baron, and a good man too, so intelligent, and does so much good. He looks after all religious works, and even

in my country he takes an interest in the working orphans. You have no idea of the letters he makes me write, to the bishop, the prefect, even to the minister. He's not a bit frightened of the Radicals, I should think not; he's sound. . . . One would think he was thirty-five, but he is forty-two. Mag, I'll uncork the other bottle, shall I? It's odd! This champagne, I didn't find it sweet enough at first, and now I like it; it warms, it warms. . . ."

And then stopping all of a sudden, "I'm not getting drunk, am I?"

"No, dear little thing," said the Englishwoman, taking her neighbour's left hand and caressing it softly between her own. "You are not drunk, you are just lively and amusing, that's all."

Mag was dreaming, her eyes fixed on her glass, her forehead wrinkled in anxiety. Suddenly she rose—

"What about smoking? I was forgetting to offer you cigarettes."

She went to get some parti-coloured boxes from a little press.

"These come straight from Constantinople," she said. "Letzling brought them in his valise."

She stretched out her hand at the same time to fill their glasses from two bottles of liqueurs, one of rose-coloured aniseed and the other of cognac.

"Aniseed, please," cried Rosalie eagerly.

The Englishwoman, without speaking, poured herself out some cognac.

All four began to smoke, Mag and Fanny, experts; Rosalie and Sandra sucking their cigarettes with the amusing expressions of novices. Rosalie went on with her chatter. She spoke once more of the Baron,

"who was such a handsome man," and of the Baroness, for whose sake "she would be thrown into the water." She spoke of the twins, Marguerite and Violette, "darlings, like a pair of pigeons"; the two youngsters, Hector and Jean, "regular little devils, who amused themselves in knocking her down and climbing upon her." She spoke of Henriette, "a really excellent little girl, but who was never able to spell properly either in French or German." The three other governesses scarcely listened to her; they were solely amused in watching the intoxication rising, rising in this child's brain. Suddenly, as unexpectedly as she had commenced talking, Rosalie became silent. She sucked her cigarette for some time, extinguished it, lit it again, and extinguished it afresh. She put her elbow on the table, and leaned her head in her hand. She had an uncertain look in her eyes, and, smiling feebly at the surrounding faces, stammered out—

"The Baron—the Baron—told me—told me——"

She was unable to finish her sentence, and suddenly dropped fast asleep. As her head swayed on the table, Fanny rose, and with a physical strength that aroused the admiration of Mag and Sandra, seized the young girl by the waist and knees, carried her across the room, and stretched her out on the Louis XVI sofa, as though she were putting a baby to bed. Having placed her there she kissed her hair and resumed her place at the table.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Mag and Sandra.

"Oh, that's nothing," said the Englishwoman laughing, "that child is so small! I could carry Mademoiselle Sandra if she wished it. We English women have our muscles developed."

Mag looked for some time at the sleeping Rosalie, then thoughtfully, her chin in her hand, she said—

"Poor kid! it's pitiable. To be exploited as she is, fifty francs a month, seven people to serve, and yet to be overflowing with gratitude to her masters! I do my best to make her assert herself in her own interests, but nothing has any effect on a disposition like that."

"There are governesses who are regular servants," said Fanny Smith disdainfully. "I know of some who make their own beds."

"Their own! you can go further than that," replied Mag. "I bet that the little one makes her master's."

The wine, the cigarettes, the liqueurs and the food, were lighting up her cheeks, usually so colourless, and had brought a moist light into her eyes. But she carried her alcohol like an experienced guest who has drunk many another bottle, and who knows by personal experience that his head will not fail him. However, she gradually lost her ordinary manner. The corners of her mouth drooped, giving her face an air of bitterness and fatigue; the forehead grew older. Madame Croze and Josette would have been surprised and uneasy at seeing the wanton appearing from beneath the outer guise of the *Fräulein*—the woman of pot-houses and foreign dens, the woman with a chequered past, a mysterious person, whose real nature now unfolded itself. The Englishwoman, however, who had drunk heavily, succeeded in becoming intoxicated with a methodical gloom, mixing cognac and aniseed in her champagne glass; but she, like the other, did not speak a single word incoherently. Alcohol had merely loosened her tongue, while the blotches deepened on her face, and all her gestures, usually so precise, lost their coherence and

regularity : one would have said that she was getting out of order. Of the four women, the one who had eaten and drunk the least was the temperate daughter of Trieste. But the sensibility of her nerves and blood was not the less affected; her grave, regular features were stiffened almost into rigidity; the beauty of her eyes became intensified. At first, the more she drank, the more and more silent she became; then she grew sociable, and began to talk. Suspicious by nature, sulky just now, when Mag had passed her verdict on Jacques Corbellier, she, too, yielded to that frame of mind which good cheer and wine induce among a small number of friends. She experienced that need of confiding which brings together isolated beings, whose circumstances are alike, exiles from their respective countries, who have endured more or less the same miseries, suffered the same trials, nourished the same hatreds, the same hopes, and practised the same vices, or very nearly so. The knowledge of Rosalie's presence would doubtless have restrained or embarrassed them. The young girl in her defencelessness, appealed to their sympathies through her youth and her disarming kindness. But all the same they felt her to be not one of themselves, too innocent, without a past, pleased with her lot, a friend of her employers, loving France through her kinship of race and language, born on the French borders, and, consequently, knowing nothing of that bitterness peculiar to the paid exile, nothing of that excessive sentiment of hatred against the land which pays you for this exile. It was this hatred of France that their drunkenness first revealed, with the mingling of scorn and envy, which our old country with its refined civilization and insouciant temperament, excites

among foreigners—France, whose absolute ruin, whose disappearance from the map of the world they all wish; whose death they have been ready so many times to celebrate, but which suddenly comes to life again and resumes her status among the peoples, renewed by genius, by force, by glory, and by all that which is even more insupportable to the other peoples than genius, force and glory: elegance and irony. These three young women, all of them desirable, Sandra, Mag and Fanny, were conscious of the elegance of Paris, especially the elegance of the toilette. Without confessing it they felt that they all, even Mag, lacked that mysterious gift of dressing which they recognized in all Parisian women, from those in society to those who run errands. Precisely because she was so horribly dressed, they forgave Rosalie Boisset for having been born so close to France; but they jeered at those of their French colleagues whom they knew, or had met in the society of their pupils. .

“They powder themselves,” declared Fanny Smith, “but under the powder their faces are dirty. For that matter, all French women are dirty and dislike taking baths.”

“And you only know the best of them,” Mag insisted. “As for me, who have lived with little French bourgeois, you can’t imagine their coarseness! A foot-bath once a fortnight, the hands and face washed in the morning, no more. The new generation is better; Guy and Josette Croze are English in their personal habits. Even the Under-Secretary takes a shower-bath because he gets headaches when he works, but if he’s in a hurry, it’s good-bye to the bath! And how coarse he is, how he perspires!

There are days when I daren't go near him! Mother Croze is of a different class; she belongs to the old school of French woman, you know; she is a provincial noble, the sister of Rosalie's mistress. She's too modest to show herself naked; she puts on her night-dress over her chemise. You can guess how comfortable that is for the toilette."

"And then," said Sandra, "all the arrangements for bathing are badly managed, and everything else, too, isn't it a fact? Heating, electricity, everything goes wrong. In Italy and in Germany, too, things are much better managed!"

"Nothing goes right in France," summed up Fanny, "it is a country that is decomposed, rotten."

They cited all the symptoms of decay that the country betrayed; and in their dialogues they unconsciously replaced their own personal observations by their recollections of what they had read in the newspapers of their own country. Each of them took in one from her own country. Mag read *The Post* of Berlin; Fanny, *The Daily News*; Sandra *The Mattino* of Naples. While continuing to smoke and drink, they exchanged these stores of hatred with biting delight: depopulation; assassins at fifteen years old; anti-militarism; the army no longer disciplined; the sailors jumped overboard with their equipment; the peasants left the land uncultivated; the old French woollen stocking, now definitely in holes, let slip the gold that had been accumulating for centuries. Frenchmen were satyrs or alcoholics; they only thought about absinthe and women. Frenchwomen, ah! Frenchwomen, they were the worst of all. And they cited the heroines of fashionable comedies: a mother debauched the college friend of her son; an

old man ruined his family for the sake of a servant-girl; a young girl captured her mother's lover. In this way they substituted afresh their recollections of literature for what actual life showed them every day. Forgetting that Madame Croze and Baroness Ropart d'Anay, the two sisters, lived almost like nuns, and that the Haumont women were unimpeachable, they returned ceaselessly to Emmeline Corbellier—and because she had, undoubtedly, an adulterous liaison, it was she who represented in their eyes the real womanhood of France.

Then cheered up by disgorging this anti-French virus which, usually, they were compelled to keep hidden, they passed suddenly to the other subject, that interested them even more: themselves, the longings of their hearts, what they were suffering or what they had suffered, no longer because they were exiles, but because they were isolated beings, without companions, excluded by their calling from the love of men. And it appeared that they harboured as much hatred against the male sex as against foreign soil. Each of them had suffered from men, in different places that they had been in. Male desire had harassed them all, or if, outside the houses where they were employed, they had allowed themselves to be tempted by some intrigue, they had been basely exploited; they had been made use of and deserted when the moment for helping them arrived. Advantage had been taken of their being compelled to respect appearances and to avoid any scandal that would rob them of their means of livelihood. They confessed now all these disasters of their hearts, leaning towards each other, their voices more discreet, more confidential, more, as it were, fraternal, than when they were

spitting out their hatred of France. It was not yet four o'clock; but the rain which inundated the court had made it dark in the little sitting-room; electric light lit up the table where gilt-tipped cigarettes ends were now piled up in the saucers, while the aromatic smoke of oriental tobacco, mingled with the breath and perfumes of the women, condensed, as it were, the odour of a harem. Sandra in her beautiful serious voice was telling what had happened to her at nineteen (she was twenty-two now) in her second situation; it was, as a matter of fact, at Abbazia, where Mag had known her, in the house of the Americans.

"You remember, Mag, that Bruston, that scoundrel? He had become rich by practising usury in the West. He was a little man, but so strong! He could bend a piece of iron like a stick of wood; he used to talk to me in corners; he used to tell me that he wanted to get a divorce and marry me. My answer was: 'All right, get a divorce, and I will marry you afterwards.' Then, one day, when only he and I were in the villa, as Madame had taken the little one to Trieste . . . it was so hot—you know how hot it is in Abbazia in the month of March. . . . I was quietly reading in my room, lying down with my dressing-gown on. In he comes, and without a word, tries to embrace me. Fortunately, I had time to seize the paper-knife in my book: it was a little japanese dagger, very sharp, and as his hands were around me, I began to strike at his coarse neck, at his cheeks, his head. He was suddenly covered with blood, and called out: '*Are you mad, are you?*' But he had to run away all the same, and well slashed, I can tell you. He told his wife that he had been cut with a piece of broken glass."

The Italian girl had acted the end of the scene, picking up a fruit-knife that lay on the table. Her eyes gleamed, and one felt that she was ready to take the blood of any one who wished by force to profit by her beauty without giving her anything in exchange.

Mag, sprawling on the table in an attitude of weariness, murmured—

“If I had played with a knife every time that my pupils’ fathers or brothers pushed open my door! I have another method, much simpler; I cry out, I cry out, as if I were in flames. Then they get out.”

In a lower tone, with the laugh of a courtesan, she added—

“And there have been times when I did not cry out at all.”

“Oh, for shame, Mag,” said the Englishwoman.

“Bah!” replied Mag, “one isn’t an angel. One is a woman with senses. It’s hard, sometimes, all alone, away from one’s own country, to have no one to speak tender things to you, to kiss you! If the master is a coarse, perspiring brute, like mine at this present moment, or one like Sandra’s Bruston, why then, of course, one is virtuous, one defends oneself by crying out, or with a knife. But there, between ourselves, (no one hears us), when it pleases us, when it tempts us, we know well enough how to leave our door open at night, or meet Monsieur somewhere in the town. And, after all, it is, perhaps, those situations where one is most happy.”

Sandra kept her beautiful eyes lowered, as if she did not dare either to approve or to contradict the cynical German. Fanny, who, not having stopped drinking, was now at the second stage of drunken-

ness—excited, making nervous gestures, her eyes blinking, her cheeks purple, declared—

"Never have I opened my door, never have I met my employer by appointment in a town. I would regard myself, if I had done so, as worse than a woman of the streets."

These last words stung Mag.

"That's all very well," she said, (and she, too, was no longer quite in possession of her senses) "we suspected it, Fanny. Men are hardly in your line."

The Englishwoman stood upright.

"What do you say? What do you wish to say? Say it, please, say it again."

She was stammering; rage and wine prevented her from finding words.

Mag, with the air of a street lad, which she easily affected when off duty, a cigarette-end sticking to her lower lip, looked her straight in the eyes.

"Come, Fanny," she said, "it isn't worth while being angry. You misunderstood me. Who the deuce is referring to Berthe Haumont-Segré? I know perfectly well that she is a very quiet girl, very strict, very good, but she is—how can I put it to you?—quite coldly, in love with you. She is utterly your slave; and that is what you like, this domination, this possession of a woman's soul—don't deny it!"

The Englishwoman, who had grown calm again, murmured—

"If that is what you mean, yes, truly that is quite possible."

"You are not angry with me?" asked Mag.

Fanny made no answer. She was really quite drunk, and seemed, with her air of stupefaction, to

have forgotten already all about the quarrel. She was watching Sandra with admiring interest.

"Mademoiselle Ceroni," she said, "I wish you would show us your hair—your hair let down, it must be very beautiful, I think."

Astonished, Sandra consulted Mag with a glance, and the latter nodded to her to consent. Then Sandra, with the beautiful gesture of a Canephore, removed the forked combs and the pins which clasped together the curls and tresses; the edifice fell down like a black avalanche. Slowly the Italian girl unwound the tresses, and presently she was enveloped below her waist by the dark-ringed waves, even more astonishing in their thickness than in their length.

A penetrating odour, an indefinable odour which seemed that of the very sap of this magnificent vegetation, effaced all the other smells that were condensed in the narrow room. Fanny Smith took a handful of the fluid mass in both her hands and inhaled it.

"Oh, it's beautiful," she murmured. "It is even more beautiful than blonde hair." She let it flow through her fingers slowly. Sandra, who was rather proud of the admiration that she evoked, arched her waist and allowed the full weight of her hair to sweep over her head at the back. With her forehead thus uncovered, she seemed ever so much younger. Mag looked at Fanny rather than at Sandra; her intelligent eyes seeking to penetrate the heart of this curious girl. And now she almost believed what the Englishwoman had said when she uttered that protest a few minutes before in defence of the purity of her morals.

"Yes," she thought, "a crazy woman, hysterical, excited by the perfume of flesh, but with no more

sexuality than a *pfennig*! Just a caress, and whisky, that's all she wants."

A light noise sounded from the side of the sofa. The forgotten bundle that was Rosalie stirred, dis-entangled itself; a head raised itself on the cushions, and a childish voice*stammered out—

"I believe I've been asleep."

The three others burst out laughing. They surrounded the little thing who, all dishevelled, still half asleep, was with difficulty regaining consciousness in the warm, luminous and smoky atmosphere.

"It's stifling here," she murmured.

"She's right," said Fanny. "Let us open the window."

The window was half-opened; a puff of fresh damp air scattered the smoke rings around the electric light which merged its intense brightness with the pallor of a winter afternoon. The half-asphyxiated lungs breathed more freely.

"Have I been asleep long?" asked Rosalie, whose fresh look and clear eyes had been restored by this rest.

"Two short hours," answered Mag. "It's five o'clock."

"Holy Virgin! and my calls! and my errands! My last train goes at a quarter to seven."

"Bah!" mocked Mag, "they won't scold you. The Baron is so good—the Baroness is so good—everybody is so good."

"That's quite true," replied Rosalie, without understanding that she was being made fun of. "But it is just because they are so nice to me that I don't want to make them uneasy." She hurriedly adjusted the disorder of her hair and her toilette, and, seeing her

anxiety, the others helped her. They hooked her up, they did her hair, they amused themselves with her as though she were a doll. When she was ready to leave, she became suddenly anxious; she searched the pockets of her old-fashioned skirt, fumbled in her little jacket, made of leather from a colt's back, even explored the interior of her corset of grey coutille. They questioned her—

"You have lost something?"

"My pocket-book, with the money for the Institute in it. More than fifteen hundred francs! Oh, if I've lost it I'd rather throw myself into the Seine than go back to Val d'Anay!"

They looked on the floor, they looked under the furniture, but found nothing, until Sandra thought of turning over the cushions of the Louis XVI sofa; the pocket-book had slipped between one of these and the back. Rosalie, her eyes still bathed in tears, began to dance. She kissed Sandra, she kissed Mag, she kissed Fanny; she opened the pocket-book, and saw that the contents were intact: a bill for a thousand and five bills for a hundred francs, which she spread out on the tablecloth mixed with twenty other objects—pictures of the Virgin, of the Sacré Cœur, of St. Christophe, and also a little zinc square such as are used by photographers at a fair for taking photographs. Mag seized it before Rosalie could prevent her.

"Oh, oh!" said the Englishwoman. "It's the picture of a lover, I'm sure of it."

"No, it's her master: it's Baron Ropart d'Anay," cried Mag delightedly.

Sandra and Fanny leaned over her shoulder and saw the picture of a tall, lean man, with a large, fair

moustache, and with a look that was at once soldierly and kindly, gallant and simple.

"They took that at the Romorantin festival the other day," said the little one. "The Baroness gave it to me herself."

She was so obviously embarrassed that they had not the heart to tease her any more. Side by side with the bank notes and the pious pictures, the Baron's photograph was restored to the pocket-book, which this time, for greater security, the young girl slipped into her corset. And after saying good-bye to everybody, Rosalie Boisset went off. They heard her running under the arch, then in the court beyond it.

"She's really a fine little girl," said Mag; "weak, but with a heart of gold."

"She has beautiful fair hair," added Fanny, who, now that the air around her had freshened, was gradually regaining self-control, and was becoming once more the correct *governess* whose services everybody envied the Haumont-Segrés in possessing.

"I, too," she said to Mag, "must go away. Berthe lunched with her cousins, the Haumont-Manins, in the Rue Palatine, you know—in those hideous apartments, so gloomy, behind the church of St. Sulpice. I have to meet her at tea-time."

"And I," said Sandra, "promised M. Jacques to bring him some Neapolitan melodies that are to be picked up at Rossi's in the Rue Jacob. We can start on the way together."

With their professional sense of responsibility, their professional demeanour also returned to them. Any one who looked at these two young women, dressed with subdued elegance as to their hats, veils and

gloves, could not have believed that a moment ago, dishevelled, untidy, they were getting drunk together and talking the tittle-tattle of *filles* in regard to their masters and themselves. Mag alone was in no hurry to resume her correct bearing, so, while the other two were finishing their arrangements for leaving, she disappeared for a second into the dressing-room, and returned in a Japanese dressing-gown, with her hair half undone.

Fanny asked laughing, "Are you going to sleep here, Mag?"

"To sleep?" she answered. "I don't think so."

The two veils, Fanny's and Sandra's, brushed amicably against the German's mouth. Mag was thanked for the little feast; all the quarrels were forgotten, and they promised to see each other again in this free and easy way as often as they could.

"Bolski is the one to thank," said Mag. "He paid for this house-warming. He won a large sum of money the day before yesterday."

They went away. Left to herself, Mag began to put the room straight, and to clear the table, upon which she left only a tea-pot and some cakes. The air of gaiety had disappeared from her face. She was serious, almost sad. And while arranging the sitting-room with the precise movements and orderliness of a German woman, she listened frequently in the direction of the court, eager to hear the sound of a certain footstep.

CHAPTER III

THE INSTITUT DE BELLES-GRÂCES

HALF-AN-HOUR before the commencement of Made-moiselle Bastinguette's lecture, "How I should have wished to have been brought up," the traffic became congested on the boulevard in front of the Concordia. February showers alternated with spells of pale sunlight that were almost warm. Tired of waiting in their motionless carriages, women and young girls profited by these intervals of fine weather to get out, and on tiptoe, hastily and timidly, to pick their way over the muddy pavement towards the entrance of the theatre. There, as usual, were displayed the advertisements of the Revue, "Ta bouche, gamine!" the success of which was not yet exhausted. La Sorelly, scarcely veiled by the hair net with large meshes, one limb and one breast exposed, her lips framed in a bird call, still faced the apish mouth of her who would presently unfold her ideas on education. At the same time, on this particular afternoon, the entrance displayed for the curious an exhibition of independent artists, violet landscapes, red and blue nudities, interiors distorted into cubes. Such were the pictures that delighted the eyes of families invited to this festival of education, to say nothing of this corner of the old boulevard, with its cosmopolitan passers-by, its hawkers, its beggars, its lorettes and its

perverts. The mothers, however, came in perfect peace of mind; it was "the thing" that young girls should listen to the lectures of the Institut de Belles-Grâces, and were they not announcing to close the season, two discourses on Modern Marriage to be given by a genuine princess? •

None the less, the plump and vivacious Madame Haumont-Manin, one of the very few mammas who allowed her grey hair to be seen, back to back with the Cyma against a polyhedral setting sun, surrounded by—in addition to her three daughters, Yvonne, Alice and Nanie—Madame Corbellier, Josette, Mag and Sandra, was laughingly protesting against the place, the subject and the lecturer.

"My good Emmeline, we are crazy, or rather we allow ourselves to be led away by these little ones who have the devil in them. Do you mean to tell me that this is the place for properly-brought-up young ladies, this common theatre, where a low *comédienne* is going to rattle off a hotch-potch cooked up in the bars? Yes, I know very well it's just this that attracts them: a singer whose ordinary repertoire they are not allowed to hear, and who, for their benefit, is going to embellish her twaddle with little songs, quite innocent and namby-pamby. Obviously, there is no great harm in that; but, all the same, we, their mothers, deserve a good ducking!"

Emmeline, whose opinions on things in general agreed in advance with the fashion, protested—

"But, my dear, everybody is doing the same. Just look at them—everybody is here: Madame de Belcours and her two eldest daughters, the young Gerouges. There's a box reserved for the Grand Duchess. No, for my part, I admit it, I find this

excellent, this Institut, in which our children can be educated while enjoying themselves; it combines the pleasant with the useful."

"And it is for the young girl a sort of bridge between educational classes and the conversation of society"—I read that just as you did, my good Emmeline, in yesterday's *Gaulois*. It is a paid advertisement. It didn't convince me," replied Madame Haumont-Manin.

"Let mamma talk," interposed Yvonne. "She gives herself old-fashioned airs like that when she discusses things. But underneath she is extremely up to date, and it amuses her, just as much as it does us, to hear Bastinguette playing the Madame de Maintenon. Doesn't it, mamma?"

This was said with an affectionate disrespect that did not grate upon Madame Haumont-Manin.

"I don't say no," she answered, "but I blame myself and you, too, just the same. Why, when I was your age my mother would avoid crossing the boulevard if I was with her!"

In the meantime, Mag, having drawn Josette aside under the pretext of showing her a nearer view of a picture of a twilight, remarkable for the fact that its sun was square, said to her—

"Try and manage for us to go into the hall and take our places as quickly as possible. If M. de Letzling and Bolski arrive now, they will be compelled to come up and talk to us; that will be repeated to your father, and he will make a fuss. In the hall, on the contrary, each will remain in his own stall."

Berthe came up just at this moment, accompanied by Fanny Smith; and it was impossible to avoid detecting in the young girl, in spite of the contrast

of the two types, an effort to resemble her governess in her way of holding herself, dressing and doing her hair. Josette approached Berthe and said to her confidentially—

"Guy will be in a stall behind you. I promised to keep it for him."

Berthe gave one of those pretty blushes which are like the reflection of dawn; but she could not restrain a furtive movement to impose silence on Josette as she pointed out Fanny to her.

"Let us go into the hall, if you don't mind," Josette proposed; "it's damp and disagreeable here."

They agreed that she was right, and made their way into the theatre. There prevailed here a persistent odour of tobacco and musk; the semi-circle was decorated with nudities of mameluke women, all in gold and with golden trumpets in their mouths. But still, it was a fine play-house. The places, booked three weeks in advance through Mag's foresight, took up eleven stalls to the right of the stage—six in the third row, and five behind these in the fourth. Josette, Yvonne, Alice, Nanie, then Berthe and Madame Haumont-Manin, filled those of the third row. Behind sat Mag, Fanny and Madame Corbellier.

The hall was already three-quarters full when Baron Ropart d'Anay and his daughter, Henriette, made their appearance. Henriette had as usual the look of a boy, dressed as a girl in order to play a comic rôle. Her father was a tall man, with a narrow waist, a fine military face, open, weather-beaten from hunting, with a large, flowing blonde moustache, his head a little touched by baldness. Father and daughter installed themselves behind Nanie; they

shook hands with one another and exchanged questions.

"How is my aunt?"—"Why isn't Guy here?" Mag asked the Baron about Rosalie, and his face lit up with pleasure at speaking of her as he replied that "the poor little thing thought it a regular treat to come, but she has had to help Madame d'Anay; the twins have been down with intestinal fever for the last eight days." Praise of Rosalie passed from lip to lip; even the two governesses, Mag and Fanny, agreed that she was "a very charming young person."

"She told me that she had lunched with you the other day at the Bouillon," said the Baron.

And by the wink with which he emphasized the end of his sentence Mag understood that Rosalie had told her master the whole escapade.

"Luckily she was asleep at the important time," she thought.

Leaning close to her and speaking to her ear alone, the Baron added—

"It was very kind of you to invite her. I am delighted that she had a little amusement. She has so much to do at home, and she puts so much heart into it! It seems, too, that she went to sleep at lunch. Poor 'Zalie!' as my children call her."

The final jostling had now begun in which, while the bell was sounding, the late-comers, like swimmers against the tide, cleaved their way through the audience with difficulty, to the annoyance and ill-humour of the punctual. Fanned by the plumes and aigrettes of five hundred women's hats, the over-heated theatre was already stifling. Josette and Mag, who were on the look-out, saw Harold Bolski and the Comte de Letzling as they

entered. Guy Croze made his way briskly to the seat reserved for him behind Berthe, who could not help consulting Fanny with a glance; but Fanny turned her eyes away affectedly. Finally, just as they were sounding the three strokes, Sandra and Loute Corbellier came to take the two last places between Madame Corbellier and Madame Haumont-Manin. The passing of the Italian girl through the central corridor had attracted attention, and even now that she was modestly seated beside her pupil, people looked at her a great deal, perfectly beautiful and perfectly simple as she was. Leaning towards Emmeline, she apologized in an undertone for being late: she had just brought Loute back from a harp class.

"The car only came for us at the Rue Moncey a quarter of an hour ago . . . and then that block on the boulevard."

The three strokes sounded again, this time with an authority and a vigour that made the audience realize that it was serious, that they were going to begin, and thus silence was imposed. The curtain rose; the scene in the background was a sort of Hammam, possibly the interior of a mosque. In front of the stage stood a little gilt Louis XVI table with the inevitable glass of water and a chair, to the left a piano with a music-stool. The theatre, full except for one stage box in the first tier, showed its sense of being deceived when, instead of Mademoiselle Bastinguette, a stripling in a black coat came out from the garden side. The effect had been foreseen and anticipated. The stripling, who was no other than the inventor of the Institut de Belles-Grâces, smiled as he declared that he understood the astonishment and discontent of the public. What was he, beside

the incomparable artist? But they might reassure themselves, the incomparable artist was ready, she was going to show herself, she was going to speak. He, the stripling inventor, had for his only mission the announcement that, in response to the written requests of many subscribers, Mademoiselle Bastinguette would embellish her lecture by a few songs, chosen, it must be clearly understood, expressly for the audience that she had the honour of addressing to-day.

"What did I tell you?" murmured Madame Haumont-Manin.

The stripling concluded by informing the public that he had finished his mission, and that he would confine himself for the rest to presenting the artist with the volumes from which she was going to read a few pages. He bowed and withdrew, amid flattering murmurs. Immediately "the incomparable artist," whose entrance all this formal preparation was intended only to retard and cause to be eagerly looked for, advanced with lowered eyes. With the incurable foolery of comedians of this kind, when they leave their proper forms of employment, she had thought of accentuating the virtuousness, the temporary purity of this afternoon, by wearing a kind of Salvation Army costume, but a Salvation Army costume for the café-concert, with the lining of the cloak a bright pink, the high-heeled shoes also pink, and the skirt almost as generous in its disclosures as the hair-net tights of the Sorelly. And as the public, taken altogether, had almost to the same degree as the low comedian this peculiar silliness, this essentially Parisian silliness, which fosters contrast even to the point of idiocy, Mademoiselle Bastinguette walked to

her chair and seated herself before her table amidst loud applause.

The lecture began; Mademoiselle Bastinguette read it out loud as if it were a part and one that she considered feeble. Really endowed with a certain comic talent, she played for the stripling, who was the admitted author of the text, the farce of from time to time allowing the audience to realize the low opinion that she herself had of this imposition. Then, in spite of herself, from habit, she gave the semblance of double meaning to this or that scrupulously harmless sentence. In the midst of an elucidation or a reading of the most edifying nature, she purposely gave a gesture or an intonation obviously *canaille*, which was immediately underlined by laughs of encouragement. After this, sure of her audience, sure of her effects, she frankly presented a parody of what she had announced. Without changing a word of the text or of her reading, she made them laugh, not only at the expense of the stripling author, but also at the expense of Madame d'Epináy, Madame de Lambert, Madame de Maintenon, and especially of poor Madame de Genlis, certain pages of whose, on the disquieting lips of Bastinguette, obtained a success of hilarity that would certainly have been neither sought nor foreseen by the author of *Adèle et Théodore*.

The audience was conquered when the divette left her lecture-table and came down to the front of the stage, while a long-haired accompanist seated himself at the piano. But at this very moment attention was a little distracted by the entrance into the box, at the left side of the stage, which had up till then remained empty, of four late arrivals, who, however, were only

men, or at least they wore their clothes. For the rest, three of them presented faces almost as powdered as those of women; two had hair artificially lightened; another, who was on the verge of sixty, had his dyed as black as a crow. Jacques Corbellier alone allowed his beautiful brown hair its natural colour and its natural appearance. The rice powder that he had on his cheeks was scarcely more than that of a man in a hurry, who has just been shaved and has forgotten to rub it off. Also he, alone of the four, had not rouged his lips. The three others were the little Count d'Amblin, the idealistic poet, Baron Lartisan (the man with the too black hair), and a German musician, Carl Vorberg, better known under the nickname of Carlin, and a great friend of Jacques'.

All of them were received in the best Parisian society. They made a sensation; women of the world who received them with a sympathy that was at once amused and scandalized, pointed them out to each other.

"There's Jacques," said Emmeline Corbellier proudly to her neighbour, Madame Haumont-Manin.

Madame Haumont-Manin, absorbed in the antics of Mademoiselle Bastinguette who was going to sing, replied by a preoccupied nod. But Sandra raised her eyes, and her glance buried itself immediately in that of Jacques, who was looking for her. They smiled at each other; for a moment they were isolated, one for the other, in this crowd that was hanging upon the divette's irresponsible lips. She sang several ballads, principally borrowed from the repertoire of 1840, having no bearing whatever on education, nor on any other of the theses that had been developed, if one can use the word, in the course of her lecture.

But she delivered them marvellously, giving point to the most banal couplet and peppering the insipidity of worn-out metaphors. They applauded, they shouted "bravo," they encored. It was no longer a question of the *Belles-Grâces*, or of education; things had got back to their normal state: Bastinguette was tickling a *café-concert* audience. The Grand Duchess (she occupied the stage box to the right) clapped her hands ostentatiously, and the Grand Duke's baritone voice could be heard murmuring quite seriously, "She is excellent! oh, really she is wonderful!" Some one in the balcony asked for the "Fishing Rod!" and a hundred voices immediately requested the "Fishing Rod." This "Fishing Rod" was a ditty in the *Revue* in which Bastinguette was taking part in the evening with Sorelly in this very place—a ditty absolutely without any sort of meaning unless you added one to it expressly. Bastinguette sang it on this occasion as if she herself did not understand it; she had also the tact to suppress a couplet that was notorious, just because, ordinarily, her antics gave it meaning. When she had finished, she resumed her place in front of the glass of water, very quickly, without leaving the audience time to take breath. Her instinct had foreseen the comic effect of the immediate juxtaposition of the "Fishing Rod" and some moralizing bluster with which the stripling had seen fit to close the text of the lecture. The effect, as she expected, was irresistible; she did not fail to make the most of it, and the lecture closed in general hilarity, in which the lecturer herself joined, bowing in response to the bravos and laughing with her large, attractive mouth and all her teeth that resembled those of a healthy monkey.

Ten minutes later, three-quarters of the audience had left the Concordia; the remaining quarter took tea at the promenade buffet, a supplementary source of profit anticipated by the organizers of the Institut. The party for which Mag had so recently secured the double row of stalls now shared three tables. Around Madame Haumont-Manin were Guy Croze, showering his attentions on Berthe, who seemed to be moved by them, Yvonne, looking rather sad, Josette and Baron Ropart. Around Emmeline Corbellier were Sandra, Loute, Henriette and Alice. Finally, around Fanny Smith, who was sulking in a dignified manner and had her back purposely turned on Guy and Berthe, was Mag with Nanie Haumont-Manin. Amid the confusion of the passages between the hall and the promenade, Mag and Josette had arranged to separate from the others; Bolski and Letzling had joined them, and they had been able to exchange a few words, a fugitive pressure of gloved finger-tips, and plan for another meeting of a few moments near Val d'Anay, where Henriette's sixteenth birthday was being celebrated the following week. As a matter of fact, Josette's father, since becoming Under-Secretary of State for War, had forbidden his wife and daughter all friendly relations with the Austrian military attaché. Mag, with half a cup of tea untasted before her, seemed in a brooding mood, while Fanny remained silent; Nanie Haumont-Manin alone, very talkative, passed endless remarks on the toilettes and hats of the people around her, while expressing regret at being unable to afford anything like them.

"Emmeline," said Madame Haumont-Manin, "here is your son."

Jacques, the object of many glances and quite

conscious of the fact, came forward with measured steps as though on a stage. He was a youth of quite remarkable beauty, with the features of his mother, refined, aristocratic, and without anything of the mean vulgarity of his father, Corbellier, nor of the unpleasant, intelligent face of his sister, Loue. His light trousers, with their careful crease, borrowed something from the hobbled shape of the skirts then in fashion. His dark brown coat fitted his waist like a corset; his feet, in their patent-leather boots, were smaller than Loue's. His face, rather large at the temples, round in the cheeks but refined in the chin, with large eyes of dark blue, and abundant hair, evoked the effigies of the youthful Bacchus. His gloved left hand crumpled the right glove against a crutch walking-stick, which had the appearance of the handle of a parasol. Smilingly he took in his right hand, with its three rings, the feminine hands stretched out to him and kissed them, even Sandra's. Perfectly at his ease, but without throwing aside his air of patronizing simplicity, he sat down between the Italian and Baron Ropart. Madame Corbellier was delighted.

"My Jacques! how nice of you to have left your friends for us! Sandra, won't you give him some tea? Tell us, dear, what did you think of the lecture? Good, wasn't it?"

"I found," said Jacques—(while Sandra, with a charming confusion on her cheeks and in her large, beautiful hands which shook, poured him out tea and offered him cakes; and Jacques, while thanking her with a glance, emphasized his syllables as if he were reciting a poem)—"I found that Bastinguette is witty to the very points of her monkey teeth. She

proved to us that, in sum, Fénelon, Mme. de Maintenon, Mme. d'Epinay and Mme. de Genlis are exceedingly immoral writers."

"Oh!" interjected the good Baron Ropart d'Anay, shocked.

"I had an idea that this was so," continued Jacques in the same precise tone, "for reading the beautiful pagan works—*The Banquet*, for example, or even *The Anthology*—gave me a taste for a harmonious life, while when reading the moralists of education—Rousseau included—I longed to escape from their virtue as from a dirty factory or a dark prison. Now that I have heard Mademoiselle Bastinguette, I am convinced; educators are scarecrows put up in the field of virtue to frighten children so that they may avoid entering it. And Mademoiselle Bastinguette has rendered us a great service by proving to us that they are ridiculous scarecrows (you know—an old hat, a torn shirt with empty sleeves waving in the wind), and that one can enter the field in spite of them. Bastinguette is a great professor of virtue."

"Isn't he amusing! isn't he poetic!" said Emmeline admiringly.

Ropart d'Anay, who felt for this discourse of Jacques the instinctive repugnance of the simple country gentleman, of the retired officer, the follower of hounds, who has no time for hair-splitting, smiled with a politeness that was a little embarrassed. Yvonne, Alice and Nanie, who laughed among themselves at Jacques' affectation, but on whom his beauty made an impression, and who were amused by him as a change from their ordinary university set, laughed pleasantly as they murmured, "Isn't Jacques killing!" Sandra remained thoughtful; a shadow of

annoyance darkened her beautiful classic face, and yet it was for her that Jacques had spoken. Guy Croze and Berthe had not heard, having been absorbed in one of those whispered conversations which nowadays are perfectly permissible among young people of different sexes.

"Morality," concluded Madame Haumont-Manin as she rose from the table—"these lectures of low *comédiennes* are not for young girls, and you may take it as settled, my dears," she added, addressing her daughters, who received the hint with a good-humour that was a little sceptical, "that until the day you are married, all three of you, you will please me by contenting yourselves, on the subject of education, with the ideas of papa and mamma."

They rose from her table at the same time that she did and from the two neighbouring tables; Guy and Berthe alone, heedless of the rest, continued to talk in a low voice, without noticing that their conversation was doubly watched—by Fanny Smith, silent, with set teeth, and also by the pretty Yvonne, who tried to laugh and be gay, but whose charming face was pale, while her eyes had dark circles round them from her efforts to keep back her tears.

Nanie, who had preserved a certain childish mischievousness, scarcely fashionable among the new generation in France, called out—

"You know, Berthe and Guy, if you haven't finished at eight o'clock one can dine here."

Berthe jumped up as though awakened; her glance sought her governess, who was waiting for her with an affectation of patient indifference. She joined her without even saying good-bye to Guy. Both of them exchanged some words in English, which no one

heard clearly but the tone of which betrayed disagreement. They reached the peristyle, where they separated: Baron Ropart d'Anay and his daughter had only just time to catch their train; Guy, Josette and Mag were returning to Madame Croze's; it was her reception-day at her house in the Avenue de Velasquez. The Haumont-Manins promised to go on there also, after making a few purchases in one of the large shops on the boulevard. Emmeline, very much left to herself, since Croze was at the War Office (he exaggerated for her benefit his ministerial duties), remembered, fortunately, an appointment to try on in the Rue de la Paix.

"Paulin-Paul's, isn't it?" said Jacques. "Oh, I'll go with you; it's amusing; that house, like an exhibition of orchids that may be poisonous, you know. They say that they make their mannequins take ether to give them that air of morbidness which they all have. Mademoiselle Sandra is coming too, isn't she?"

"It's time for Louie's German lesson," Sandra objected.

"Bah! you can jabber German at Paulin-Paul's while Mamma is being fitted. Jump in now."

Emmeline acquiesced, and all four entered the Havana-coloured motor. A block stopped them, before they reached the Place de l'Opéra, beside and a little behind the entirely black *coupé* in the latest style in which Fanny and Berthe were seated. Louie, whose brown eyes with their yellow iris allowed nothing to escape them, was the only one to notice that Berthe, leaning back in a corner, had her handkerchief to her eyes, while Fanny, sitting straight upright, was talking, talking.

CHAPTER IV

AT VAL D'ANAY

A BEAUTIFUL spring day bringing with it joy, light, refreshing and yet languorous perfumes, and the desire to stretch oneself, to spread out one's limbs, to melt in voluptuous tenderness, was bathing, under a changeless blue sky the whitish slate-coloured house called Val d'Anay.

The house at its full length looked out on a smiling face of nature through high cross-barred windows on the ground-floor, above which were an equal number of attic windows, much lower, like so many dots on *i*'s. Before the Revolution it had sheltered a little community of women, who lived on the bounty of the Ropart d'Anays—whose family then lived in the Château d'Anay near Selles-sur-Cher. The Revolution dispersed the nuns without pulling down their house, but it destroyed the Château so thoroughly that in 1815 rye was growing on its old site. The Ropart d'Anays returned with the King, and installed themselves in the old convent, which was more suitable to their present fortune. And since then, from father to son, four generations of Ropart d'Anays had lived there, with the large or small resources that resulted from more or less rich marriages, but always without display, asking no favour from the successive Governments, perfectly

content with their position as cavalry officers, agriculturists, sportsmen. Such had been the life of Baron Germain Ropart d'Anay, the father of the present Baron Henri; such was the life of Baron Henri himself. As a lieutenant of dragoons, he had married for love Mademoiselle Blanche de Sauzon, at that time fresh and pretty, whose beauty, owing to the birth of five children in twelve years would doubtless not have been effaced, if she had only taken the trouble to preserve it, and if she had not made it a point of honour, like the majority of women of her class, to cease being a woman from the moment that she became a mother. On the death of Baron Germain, Henri left the service and settled down at Val d'Anay; he was then thirty-nine years old and already the father of three children. In the meantime, his sister-in-law, Julie de Sauzon, married the son of a rich banker of Romorantin, named Croze, a *mésalliance* aggravated by the advanced opinions of the said Croze, who not long afterwards represented the district as a Radical deputy. But as the two sisters were very fond of each other, relations between the two households continued, and Croze had shown himself such a good fellow, had made such adroit use of his wife in order to protect societies, vicarages and free schools without compromising himself in the eyes of the electors, that they ended by tolerating him, even in this exclusive and reactionary corner of the Provinces. They railed at him; they discussed him as a sectarian and an impious person. But as, when all was said and done, the whole Conservative party was in his debt or was asking him for something, as, when Secretary of Fine Arts, he had restored all the tottering belfries of the neighbourhood and had

endowed the Mayories—without distinction as to political opinions—with specimens of those vague copies which moulder in the lofts of the Louvre, as, finally, Madame Croze was sympathetic to everybody, while Guy and Josette, besides professing opinions of the most reactionary fervour, were two of the most brilliant representatives of the youth of the neighbourhood, the Crozes, under the ægis of the Ropart d'Anays, won the victory after having broken only two or three ultra-republican friendships in the whole place.

Leaving their parents to sip their coffee on the shady terrace, a group of young people with their governesses went towards the tennis-court that was situated near a little pond quite close to the edge of the woods. Henriette, the heroine of the day, whose sixteenth birthday was being fêted, was walking arm in arm with Loute Corbellier, when she turned and called out in a familiar tone—

“Rosalie !”

Rosalie was pouring out cognac for a tall and robust personage with a snow-white beard, who, in spite of his slight stoop, had the air of an old Hercules; he was Berthe Haumont-Segré's father. She turned round, and replied—

“Yes, Henriette.” •

“You are coming to play tennis ?”

“No, no,” interposed Madame Ropart d'Anay immediately. “Leave us Rosalie, we want her.”

Henriette made a gesture of disappointment. Rosalie called out—

“I will be with you directly, I will join you at the tennis-court.”

And one could divine that underneath her generous

white blouse, the good girl's heart suffered at not being able to please, at one and the same time, pupil and mother. But scarcely had she finished serving the liqueurs than Madame Ropart d'Anay said—

“My little Rosalie, go and get me my strip of fancy needlework. It is in the drawing-room on the bridge-table. Afterwards go upstairs just to see how the twins are getting on.”

The Baroness Ropart d'Anay still preserved under her hair, which was obviously turning grey from the scorching that the open air and the sun had inflicted upon her complexion while she followed the hounds, those remnants of a great beauty that are more touching to contemplate than those of a work of art. But the air of repose which the premature wrinkles had not banished from her brow, the provincial simplicity of her dress of violet taffetas, which made no effort at hiding the heavy lines of her figure, a something soothing and kindly in her demeanour and in the tone of her voice, all these things showed in her an absolute indifference to the wear and tear imposed upon her by time, and a satisfaction in being the woman she was to-day: a country matron, surrounded by her forty-year-old husband and her children, big and little. Seated beside her, her sister, Julie Croze was like her, with less of nobility, and more vivacity in her features. Not so pretty as her sister had been a short time ago, and only two years her junior, she now appeared ever so much the younger. The frantic struggle which sustains Parisian women against their great enemy, Time, had led her to protect her figure, her complexion, her hair. A well-cut costume of grey striped cloth endowed her with a discreet elegance. Moreover, convalescent as

she was from an attack of phlebitis, she was on this particular day inspired by that renewal of youth, which two months of rest and of enforced *régime* infallibly bring to a woman of that age. The animation of her gestures and her voice contrasted with something a little stagnant in the Baroness' tranquillity. While her sister bent her calm face over the end of the canvas that Rosalie had brought, Madame Croze spoke about her husband whom she adored, whom she admired, and whose sunny disposition and evident delight in her company guaranteed (she believed) his faithfulness. She told of the immediate success which the new Under-Secretary for War had achieved among his colleagues.

"He has drawn up a whole programme of reforms for the mobilization of aeroplanes. And his scheme has so amazed the Council that the Commission has been appointed without delay and begins work to-day."

"That's just why he wasn't able to come," Emmeline observed.

And immediately, realizing that she had said something stupid, she added: "It is just the same with my husband. He is so busy in preparing for the Exhibition of Ghent."

Emmeline, whose embonpoint sustained with difficulty the narrow sheathing of a satin scabbard of the *charmeuse* order—Emmeline, with a liqueur in her hand, had just seated herself beside the two sisters. She got on particularly well with Julie, for both of them shared a common admiration for Croze, and, when they were together, could scarcely speak on any other topic.

Quite close to this trio, a group had formed on the

terrace around a wicker table—a group consisting of the jovial, plump Madame Haumont-Manin, her sister-in-law, Madame Haumont-Segré, a thin and pale person with the complexion of a dyspeptic, a kind of strange and ghastly caricature of her daughter, Berthe, and Baron Ropart d'Anay. Madame Haumont-Segré led the conversation in one of those sad and frail voices which induce silence by their very mournfulness and fragility. But the energy of her words contrasted with the exhausted tone in which she pronounced them.

"They are asses, jack-asses" (she was speaking of doctors). "I don't want a single one more,—Bourdier had me at death's door gorging me with pies and thick soups. Lavergne, who cured Berthe so cleverly when she had that attack of chlorosis last year, poisoned me last week with his microbe broth."

"Haven't you also consulted that Hungarian doctor?" asked Madame Haumont-Manin of her sister-in-law. "What is his name? Wagner? Werther . . ."

"Werner, yes. . . . He" (and the distressed face of the chronic patient lit up) "he is, perhaps, less of a charlatan than the others. He prescribes nothing at all. He examines you minutely every second day. Oh, that lasts for more than twenty-five minutes. Afterwards he tells you frankly: 'I have not the least idea what is the matter with you.'"

"And that costs a louis," said Ropart d'Anay laughing.

"A louis? You're joking. Werner receives fifty francs a visit. He is very rich. He has the most beautiful collection of impressionists."

Madame Haumont-Segré said this with a kind of

pride. In the meantime, the two brothers Haumont, Maxime and Georges, the banker and the professor, after walking for some time side by side the full length of the terrace, the one lighting cigarette after cigarette, the other chewing a cigar, rejoined the trio consisting of Emmeline, Blanche and Julie, who made them sit down, protesting that smoking would not inconvenience them. Almost as tall as his brother and scarcely any younger, Professor Haumont had nothing of the old man^o about him. Clean-shaven, thin and active, well-dressed, without any studied elegance, but well-groomed in the English manner, it was he rather than his brother that one would have taken for the financier.

At the moment that the two brothers seated themselves beside Julie, Blanche and Emmeline, the three ladies' conversation turned upon governesses. Each of them was pleased with her own. Baroness Ropart told them what Rosalie was, spoke of the young Belgian's excellent^o heart, her practical intelligence, her light-heartedness, her indefatigable activity, explained how she looked after the children and how she helped the Baron in the management of the estate.

"As for me," said Madame Croze, "I confess to having nothing but praise for Magda. She is a girl of exceptional ability; Josette is very fond of her. She has only one fault: she is a little miserly. One hardly ever sees her spend anything: but, doubtless, she is saving. And then, I believe, she left her parents in a rather pitiable condition; she supports them. I have to pay her salary sometimes in advance. But during my attack of phlebitis she was of the greatest assistance to me in looking after the house. Josette understands nothing about it."

"Oh, she is perfect, your Mag," said Emmeline, who was always ready to use superlatives. "In the first place, she got me Mademoiselle Ceroni, with whom I am so very pleased. She is so pretty this Sandra, so well educated, so correct . . ."

"Between ourselves," asked the Baroness, lowering her voice, "don't you find her too pretty? It seemed to me that Jacques paid her a great deal of attention."

The two Haumonts suppressed a smile. Emmeline protested—

"Jacques, Jacques! In love? He disdains love. You haven't read the last verses that he has written, 'Love, O, little game, too innocent for me.' No, Sandra pleases him (he tells me so, he tells me everything) because she is so like the courtesan of Sodona the one at Monte Oliveto, she who tempts St. Benedict. And also because she is such a good musician. But there's nothing to be feared. Besides, if anything like that happened, Mademoiselle Sandra would not remain in my house."

A rather awkward silence followed this declaration; the old Haumont broke it, throwing away his chewed cigar and bending his heavy snow-white head.

"You are very lucky, all of you," he murmured.

"Why do you say that?" asked Emmeline.

"Because I see here, three reasonable and experienced mothers proclaiming themselves delighted with the three governesses of their children."

"Well, but I imagine that Madame Haumont-Segré and you are not to be pitied," exclaimed the Baroness, raising her eyes from her needlework. "Neither Mag, nor Sandra, nor Rosalie comes up to your Fanny, who has the air of a regular woman of the world."

"Mademoiselle Smith had certainly an excellent influence on Berthe when she began to attend to her," replied Haumont-Segré. "Berthe was nervous, excitable, indolent, violent. She subdued and disciplined her in a wonderful way. Unfortunately, this influence continues to-day when Berthe is eighteen years old. It continues and it increases, thanks to the state of my wife's health. . . . Finally, Berthe listens only to Mademoiselle Smith; neither my wife nor I count for her." •

"Then send her away," said the Baroness, removing her spectacles from her forehead.

"That is not convenient," muttered the professor.

"It is practically impossible," his brother said in confirmation. "Berthe has a private fortune of her own, her uncle Segré, my partner for eleven years, left her more than a million francs. Berthe is the mistress of her own fortune. And I am in this position, my good friends. I am compelled to admit that if I were to send away Mademoiselle Smith, my own daughter who can get on quite well without us, would leave with her."

"You believe that?" said Emmeline.

"I am sure of it."

At this juncture, all conversation on the terrace was interrupted by the arrival of the twins, seated facing each other in their go-cart, which was wheeled by Andrée, their nurse, a young Solognote, with red hair and a simple expression. Rosalie followed. The twins were like two little red apples in white and blue, and their four little hands were closed in pairs on two rattles exactly like each other. They were brought first of all to their father; the Baron's head and Rosalie's leaned together over the rolling cradle.

Then they all vied with each other in welcoming Mesdemoiselles Violette and Marguerite. They did not cry, they did not laugh, they looked at these people with large fixed eyes and seemed to be thinking: "What a fuss all these people are making; as for us, we are very quiet."

"They have finished their soup?"

"Oh, yes, Madame la Baronne," said Andrée, "Mademoiselle Marguerite even wanted more."

"Violette is going to sleep." One of the twins, in fact, had let her rattle fall on the coverlet without, however, letting go of it, and her head swayed on the pillow.

"We are going to take them into the shade of the big elm," said Rosalie, "they will have a good sleep in the open air. The weather is so mild."

The Baroness approved.

"Afterwards," Rosalie questioned, "would Madame la Baronne like me to go and join Henriette at tennis?"

"Certainly, my dear, amuse yourself for a little. But I count on you to see that we are served with tea on this terrace at five o'clock."

From the terrace they watched the little go-cart being pushed away by Andrée towards the great elm-tree that reared its enormous trunk to a height of 180 feet with its powerful branches adorned with young green leaves, like those of water-cress. Rosalie escorted the go-cart, as also did the Baron, who was devoted to his two latecomers. He went as far as the elm-tree, and remained there a second while the nurse arranged things; then he returned towards the château whilst Rosalie went quickly away in the direction of the tennis-court.

Rather short-limbed, but active, with good lungs, Rosalie quickened her pace almost to a run. And when she actually ran she laughed. At what? At the ineffable charm of this afternoon, young like herself, that was being stirred by faint and gentle breaths like those vague and tender aspirations by which Rosalie felt herself disturbed, and which overflowed, as she herself did, with the joy, the hope and the ardour of living. The humble foreign orphan employed at Val d'Anay at fifty francs a month, the nursery governess who rose at six every morning and who collapsed with fatigue at night towards eleven o'clock on her solitary bed, sometimes without having the strength to unhook her bodice, had scarcely reason, it would seem, for being grateful for her destiny. But Rosalie was happy at Val d'Anay, with a sense of well-being so intense that she had never known anything like it in the days when her father and mother were alive, and she led between them the existence of a daughter of little shopkeepers who are in business difficulties. She had easily adapted herself to the new conditions, having been born to obey, to serve. When she uttered the words, "M. le Baron, Mme. la Baronne," she experienced the sensation of pride. She took pleasure in the oldness of the family with which she worked, in the respect with which this family was treated throughout the district, in the tone of the house, which appeared magnificent to her beside the meanness in which her childhood had been reared. Above all, she looked up to and loved her employers. Even what was conventional in their virtues, even their narrowness of caste, did not shock her. On the other hand, their disinterestedness delighted her, as also did their charity, their generosity,

their sincere contempt for money. Her own parents had been honest in the ordinary sense of the term—that is to say, incapable of stealing an article or a piece of money—but sordid pinch-pennies, making use of the lowest trickery to sell goods no longer fresh, conscientious through self-interest towards regular customers, but impudently cheating the merely casual ones. At Val d'Anay, Rosalie breathed a cleaner moral atmosphere. The Baron and Baroness gave, without counting the cost, their time and their money to good works. Lying was considered dishonourable even by the children; they preferred being stupid in business to appearing sharp or grasping. As for the people in their employment, they were treated with kindly familiarity in accordance with the old tradition.

Rosalie had had an attack of mumps a short time after her arrival at the château, and she had been nursed by the Baroness herself as though she had been her mother, and without the slightest heed of infection. She preserved a lasting recollection of this illness, and it is no mere figure of speech to say that she would have thrown herself into the fire for her mistress. She was also devoted to the children, to the simple and light-hearted Henriette, to Hector and Jean, unmanageable but with hearts of gold, and to the irresistible twins. As for the Baron, for him she entertained in her heart a complex feeling that she in no way tried to analyse. Her admiration for the man mingled with the need of humility and obedience, while at the same time she felt no fear in his presence, but, on the contrary, never found herself so happy as when he was there beside her, when she could see him and listen to him. She considered him

in the light of an infallible guardian. If by chance she touched him—as just now, when their foreheads had brushed against each other over the go-cart—she experienced a delicious emotion, the emotion of a devotee who has kissed a relic and who feels herself perfumed all over with sanctity. And perhaps it was particularly at the recollection of this touch that the innocent Rosalie Boisset was smiling as she hurried towards the tennis-court. But she was also smiling at the caressing light, at the delicious atmosphere, at the delicate grass, at the trees of a yellowish or a bluish green, at the careless breath of an east wind that played with this intoxicating air, at everything that a radiant March afternoon, which seemed like one in May, contains of appeal to life and to love.

As she reached the tennis-court a game had just finished, Berthe and Guy on one side, Mag and Josette on the other, leaving the court to the three little Ropart d'Anays, who immediately insisted upon their governess making up the four. Sandra and Fanny, sitting side by side on a seat, were talking with Jacques. Mag and Josette plunged together into the forest. Guy took Berthe down to the pond, made her get into a boat and sculled her amidst the reeds towards that bend in the bank where high forests of birch trees, leaning towards the water, cast a fairy shadow over it, while some willows dipped their branches into the motionless surface. On this particular day, Fanny Smith affected to pay no attention to her pupil, and on her side Berthe appeared to have regained her independence and to accept boldly her rôle of fiancée. Jacques, dressed with extreme care, left the seat and stretched himself out at the feet of Sandra and Fanny, who had become silent, and com-

menced to repeat some stanzas of Henri de Régnier. Sandra, sensitive to poetry as to music, listened, her pure face bending towards Jacques; Fanny, concentrated, secretive, with pursed lips, was lost in reverie, her back turned towards the pond, where the boat which carried Berthe and Guy was already lost to sight under the shade of the drooping willows. And upon all these beings, perturbed by different passions, there hovered the intense and sweet allurements of amorous spring.

In the forest, Mag and Josette walked quickly. Josette, who had known the ground since her childhood, acted as guide; hurrying along, they exchanged rapid replies.

"If only they haven't met with a breakdown!"

"And, above all, if only they haven't lost their way! It isn't an easy country. All the cross-roads look alike."

"I mapped out the road as well as I could."

The path became gradually obscured by ferns and gorse, and grew narrower; then it disappeared. Josette struck resolutely across the copse in a direction where, becoming less thick and less entangled, it allowed an opening to show itself a short distance ahead. Suddenly she stopped.

"The car!" she said in a low tone.

A rumbling was heard and came nearer. The girls continued to advance. As they reached the glade where five paths studded themselves before them, a grey car, shaped like a huge shell, pulled up and stopped dead. Bolski jumped to the ground, followed by Letzling, who had been driving. The place was so obviously solitary that the

two young women were not afraid of showing themselves, and the delight of both was so intense that they forgot all the forms of conventional politeness as they forgot even each other. Mag ran to Bolski with the eagerness of a woman in love. And if there were more modesty in the behaviour of Josette, if she gave only her ungloved hand, her bare wrist, to the lips of Letzling, she was none the less so perturbed as not even to notice the long-drawn, lover-like kiss that passed between Mag and Bolski. Mag disengaged herself in time to avoid being seen by her pupil.

"Not here," she whispered to Bolski. "Come, let us leave them."

She regained with Bolski the cover of the woods, while Josette remained standing motionless, hand in hand with Letzling in full daylight, close to the waiting motor, which was throbbing quickly in low puffs like the breathing of a watch-dog. They looked into each other's eyes, their faces bent towards each other. The romance of this meeting delighted them. That they should have met so exactly at the arranged time, in the midst of this forest coolness in the flush of spring, this seemed to them a propitious fatality, a friendliness of destiny that had at last been won over to their love.

"I am happy," murmured Josette.

He, overflowing with Teutonic idealism, and at this moment honestly prepared for every sacrifice—his future, his family, everything—in order to clasp in his arms the exquisite creature whose eyes were hypnotizing him, exclaimed—

"Come, I implore you. Let us start."

He indicated the car with a glance. She smiled, at once shocked and grateful.

"You must be mad. . . . Good heavens! what would they say of us?"

But he, under the spell of that irresistible fascination which the open love of an innocent girl casts upon the will of an impetuous man, persisted—

"Let them say what they like. Your father will be so much the more willing to give in. I swear to you, Josette. . . . Come, you and Mag; I will take both of you to a suite of rooms that Bolski has rented. I swear to you that I shall not pass the door and that Mag shall not leave you. Your father will give in; he is only afraid of scandal, of the newspapers. Come."

And close to her, his face almost touching hers, as he felt her to be moved, he continued—

"My Jo. . . . My wife!"

At that word she almost fainted, and he took advantage of the moment to touch her cheek with his lips. But immediately she drew away, unaffectedly resisting.

"Adolf, that is not right. Leave me. In any case I must go back; we have only a few minutes. They will notice. But I am happy to have seen you. My poor friend! To travel more than a hundred and twenty miles just to talk to me for five minutes! That's nice of you. Ah! Mag is signalling to me to return."

As a matter of fact, Mag and Bolski now reappeared. They were silent. Mag recalled her pupil with a nod.

"I don't want to leave you, I don't want to leave you," repeated Letzling. "When shall I see you again?"

"Alas!" she said, her eyes suddenly moist with

tears, "I don't know; it is becoming impossible. Papa is so dead set against you."

He was clinging to her fingers, but these fingers uneasily sought to detach themselves. Then the fear of losing her gave him the audacity to utter words that for a long time he had been wishing, and yet not daring, to utter—

"Come with Mag . . . once . . . once only."

He did not say where, he did not say any more. But she understood, and confessed it by her blush. She did not make the protest that he had expected. She was herself too unhappy, too sad, at the thought of no longer meeting the fiancé of her choice. She made no answer, and on his side he did not insist. Mag and Bolski rejoined them. They talked for a few seconds, all four of them, quite conventionally, after which they separated as if their meeting had been the happy accident of two walks. And while the governess and her pupil hurried back to Val d'Anay, they heard the rumble of the grey motor roar, grow fainter and fainter until it was only carried to them by puffs at intervals. A loud whistle of the siren faded away in the far, far distance.

Josette walked beside Mag in silence. She was astonished at the hope that sang in her heart, and she blamed herself for feeling as she did. Turning her head towards Mag, she saw that she was worried. She took her arm affectionately.

"Something is going wrong with you?"

Mag answered simply—

"Bolski has gambled again and lost."

"Can I help you, Mag?"

"Oh no; it is too big a sum. Thank you, my dear. Don't let us speak of it any more; it will arrange

itself. And you? What did you talk about with the Count?"

Josette was on the point of answering when she heard her name called out at a short distance.

"It's Guy," she said. "They must be looking for us."

She quickened her step, going in front of Mag. At the first turn Guy greeted her.

"You were calling me?"

"Yes; I had seen you go in that direction. I wanted to see you. I'm very unhappy, my little sister."

"Berthe?"

"Yes. . . . Oh, Mag, you can stop," said Guy to the German, who was turning away on purpose, and he went on with his confidence. "You saw I had taken Berthe with me in the boat. We had landed on the little peninsula. Berthe was simpler, nicer, more natural to-day. I had never seen her like that before. It seemed to me that at last I had got the better of the English devil. We were sitting beside the water. She allowed me to talk marriage . . . name the date . . . next July . . . when I shall have finished with my thesis. She was interested in my work in chemistry, and it isn't particularly amusing. She wanted to visit my laboratory in the Avenue Velasquez. She was delightful. Then . . ."

He hesitated.

"Then what?"

"I assure you, Josette, that I am not hesitating for fear of shocking you, but it was so ridiculous! Well, here it is. I took Berthe in my arms, and embraced her eagerly, perhaps too eagerly. Only, as we understand each other, what harm was there in it? Would

you believe that all of a sudden she repulsed me with violence, as if—as if I were a vagabond that was attacking her? She rushed away; she refused to go in the boat; she ran all along the bank. I rowed as hard as I could to get to the tennis-court before her. She was calling, 'Fanny, Fanny.' That d——d Englishwoman ran to meet her, and I had the pleasure of seeing them from my boat throwing themselves into each other's arms like two people who had escaped from a shipwreck."

"Oh," said Josette, "why did you do that, Guy? Berthe is impressionable. One does not treat young girls that one wants to marry like *cocottes*."

Guy lowered his head like a scolded child, as he continued to excuse himself—

"I assure you, I did nothing improper. I pressed Berthe to me as one would one's fiancée, and then everything around us was too beautiful, too tender; it was not my fault."

Mag gave a mysterious smile. She was watching Josette, and, knowing her pupil well, she divined the trouble, the amorous suggestion that her brother's confidence had stirred in his sister. In very truth Josette was thinking: "Why did Berthe do that? Guy loves her, Guy wishes to marry her, and she loves him. She is ridiculous. But I—what about me? If Adolf had made the mistake of Guy, would I have run away like that? Oh no! oh no!"

"Would you like a piece of advice, Monsieur Guy?" said Mag.

They had always been good friends, and Guy was grateful to the German for her devotion to this little sister of his, whom he loved.

"Go ahead," he said.

"Leave Berthe to be wrapped up in her Made-moiselle Smith; don't bother about her any more than if she had ceased to exist, and make love to Yvonne Haumont-Manin, who is crazy about you and who is worth a thousand of Berthe."

"Mag," said Guy, "you are immoral."

However, when they had rejoined the others and returned to the terrace for tea, he followed Mag's advice, and, yielding to the desire for avenging his hurt pride, he seemed not to see Berthe's anxiety and red eyes. He took his place beside Yvonne, who did not conceal her pleasure.

The Corbelliers and the Haumont-Segrés left Val d'Anay immediately after tea, and returned to Paris in their respective cars. The Crozes and the Haumont-Manins went by train after dinner. The dinner was gay. Josette could not drive out of her heart a song of hope, aroused by the meeting of that afternoon, by Guy's story and also by this insidious spring. The little Haumont-Manins swarmed round Guy, Alice and Nanie with a naïve impertinence openly favouring his sudden attachment to Yvonne. Mag hid her anxieties under her ordinary mask of good-humour. As for Rosalie, the Ropart d'Anays amused themselves in making her drink, in spite of the smiling remonstrances of the Baroness. To tell the truth, after dinner, as the champagne had flowed freely, a healthy and animated gaiety showed itself all round the table, particularly in Henriette, the Baron and Rosalie.

A game of "Lanturlu" kept this good-humour going until close on ten o'clock, the moment of separation. The château omnibus was waiting at

the door to take the Parisians to the station. The night was so mild that the Baron climbed up on the box-seat and took the reins from the coachman's hand. Rosalie, whose head felt heavy, and who longed to taste the fresh air of this beautiful night, had asked permission to accompany Mag. They reached the station only just in time for the departing guests to enter the railway carriage after hurried embraces. When Rosalie and the Baron returned to the omnibus, a damp breeze swept over their faces. The weather had changed. The Baron buttoned his overcoat and said to the coachman—

"Charles, you can drive."

He entered the conveyance and sat down beside Rosalie. As the young girl drew back in order to make room for her master, he took her familiarly by the arm and held her back.

"It begins to be cold," he said. "Let us get warm."

He pretended to be chilly and to wrap himself up, and when the omnibus started he kept his neighbour's arm in his hand. It was well over a mile and a half from the station to the château. They passed through woods; the darkness was almost complete inside the omnibus, but the yellow reflections of the lamps danced in front, to right and left, from the shadow cast by the box-seat. The Baron heard Rosalie's breathing, uneven, perturbed. He asked her in a voice that was not his ordinary one—

"Are you well, little one?"

She could scarcely put sound into her reply—

"Yes, Monsieur le Baron, quite well."

He continued to hold her arm. Suddenly he felt her closer to him, touching his shoulder. The feather of a toque that she was wearing tickled his ear. He

stammered out, really not knowing if he were enticing her, or if it were she who was pressing herself against him—

“My little one, my dear little one!”

Her young breast now rose and fell against his waistcoat. He bent down and almost bit into the sweet, full lips of the young girl. In her turn, she stammered out—

“Oh, Monsieur le Baron . . . Madame . . . Madame la Baronne is so good . . . so good!”

And even as she said this she returned his kiss clumsily, but distractedly.

BOOK, II

SANDRA

CHAPTER I

THE THREE LITTLE ONES OF THE RUE PALATINE

"By opening the dining-room door into the drawing-room," Alice remarked to her sister Yvonne, "one gets a view of the square and that makes it a little more cheerful."

She tried the effect on the spot. Yvonne, who was arranging cups and Japanese napkins on the table, turned round to judge the effect. To brighten up the Haumont-Manins' dining-room which looked out on to a kind of rectangular well between black walls pierced by peep-holes with wire grating, was no easy task, even for a bright May afternoon like this. Yvonne declared—

"I see the back of the choir of St. Sulpice and three leaves of one of the chestnut-trees in the square. Evidently it is more cheerful."

The real cheerfulness was their laughter, which bubbled out into the silence and the semi-darkness of the gloomy room and suddenly infused into it joy and, as it were, the illusion of light itself. Alice, in her turn examined her sister's work.

"Your table is pretty," she said; "but why haven't you put some roses in the bowl? There are some splendid Gloires de Dijon in the drawing-room."

"Guy is afraid of flowers with too heavy a scent. It goes to his head and gives him hay fever."

"Oh, in that case," replied Alice, with an ironical curtsey, "let us banish the roses."

Two nice afternoon aprons covered their costumes, both alike, of blue foulard, very simple, very girlish, but none the less denoting that they were mindful of elegance and acquainted with the fashions, as they continued their preparations. It was an event of no less importance than the reception, towards five o'clock, of Guy and Josette Croze, Madame Corbellier and an assistant lecturer at the Sorbonne, named Monsieur Lecœur, who had all been invited to hear Jacques sing his Neapolitan songs with Sandra. In reality the songs of Jacques and Sandra were only a pretext, as Madame Haumont-Marin well knew, for bringing Guy Croze and M. Lecœur to the Rue Palatine. Since the scene at Val d'Anay, Guy had not seen Berthe, and, in his wounded pride, he was attaching himself more and more to Yvonne. As for Nanie, the youngest of "the little ones of the Rue Palatine," she admired to distraction the oratorical powers of M. Lecœur. All the winter and all the spring she had not missed a single one of the lectures that he was just finishing on "The French Provinces during the Revolution."

"There . . . everything is in order," said Alice. "The cakes, the puff pastry, the port, we are only waiting for Nanie's *petits fours*. Heavens! what a time she takes over any little bit of shopping! For three quarters of an hour . . ."

"There she is!" interposed Yvonne.

Nanie entered the dining-room laden with bulky packages, from which she disentangled herself with extreme care. She had overheard the criticism passed by her sister and at once protested:

"You think that it's easy to lug about *éclair*s and puffs? I didn't want to get the whole lot into a pulp! And besides, I have had the greatest difficulty in finding any chocolate caracks."

"And M. Lecœur has a weakness for chocolate caracks, poor dear!";

Their joyous laughter gladdened again the gloomy ceilings. They were the greatest friends these three, in spite of the fact that Yvonne and Alice were inseparable, while Nanie asserted her independence, was never dressed like her two elder sisters and was less fond of society and sport but more intellectual than they. For the rest she was less good-looking: a nice French plum, as her mother called her, her hair and complexion both too dark, but her figure moulded like an exquisite statue of clear bronze, and endowed with the most *spirituel* little face that could be seen at the Tuesday lectures of M. Lecœur.

The fancy cakes were unpacked.

"Lay them out, you two, I'm going to inspect the *quatre quarts* that Elodie is making us."

Elodie was the cook, or to speak more accurately, the general servant of the Haumont-Manins; for she undertook the whole service of the house with only the assistance of a scrubber once a week and a char-woman every second day. The Haumont-Manins were badly off. Belonging to a University family, the two brothers Haumont, Maxime and Georges, on leaving school, had been obliged to earn their living at once, the eldest becoming an employee in the Segré bank, and the younger a provincial schoolmaster, while he was preparing to enter the École Normale. Each on his own path had reached his goal. Maxime, the son-in-law and associate of his chief,

afterwards chief in his turn on the death of his father-in-law; Georges, a professor of Bordeaux, and Montpellier and afterwards of the Collège de France, a member of the Institut from the age of forty, the author of books famous on both sides of the Atlantic, but in spite of everything remaining almost a poor man: for his large octavo volumes cost him, each one of them, six or seven years' work and brought him in only ten thousand francs (a prodigious success for historical and Roman literature works), and Mlle. Josephine Manin, whom he had married at Bordeaux, was the daughter of a great merchant who had been ruined. The Haumont-Manins, with their three children, lived without ostentation. In spite of this their home never presented that penurious or slovenly or ignobly disordered aspect which disgraces some of the modest households of the lesser bourgeoisie in France. Josephine Manin, brought up in that proud aristocracy of Bordeaux merchants, who believe that they are losing caste by marrying into the nobility, had known, until she had approached her twentieth year, the ample life of a large house and a large staff of servants. Intelligent, industrious and light-hearted, she now drew from the modest revenue of her husband the maximum of comfort and even of appearances; she knew how to dress the professor and she knew how to bring up her daughters herself; she took her place in Paris. The apartments of the Rue Palatine were sombre, but dignified: the second storey of a private house dating from the eighteenth century, the proprietors of which occupied the remainder of the building. Thus the stone staircase with its wrought iron banisters kept up the dignity of the house; the gloomy rooms were, at all events, lofty, and instead

of the miserable concierge of so many unfurnished apartments, it was a porter in livery who received the visitors. The only *dot* that Mlle. Manin had brought her husband after her father's failure was a few beautiful pieces of old furniture, some rich carpets, and some valuable pictures with which the apartments were decorated. For the rest, the house-keeping zeal of "the three little ones" made up for the lack of servants. Their mother had brought them up in their early years, not to the menial work of the household, which degrades a young girl and for which it is much easier and less expensive to find substitutes, but to that more valuable science of organization and of care for the home as well as for their own personal expenditure and dress. The Haumont-Manins gave dinner-parties to their friends only three times a year; but they managed, in spite of the absence of footmen in plush breeches, that the dinners surpassed in quality those of the Haumont-Segrés, whose *chef* received the pay of a colonel. It was because "the three little ones" taxed their ingenuity for days in preparing the menu, in enriching it with recipes gathered from out-of-the-way sources, and with provincial specialities such as Landes ortolans, which it was impossible to buy in Paris for their weight in gold. While training them in this way for their domestic rôle, Madame Haumont-Manin, not being rich enough to pay for a governess, had scrupulously watched over their education, a task that her husband's relations in the professorial world had made easy. Three pretty pedants? By no means! Nanie herself, the most intellectual of the three, danced charmingly, dressed with taste and handled both a racquet and a golf club.

All three of them had learnt English and then German during their father's holidays, while they were installed abroad with some other professorial household. Finally, at the respective ages of eighteen, twenty and twenty-one, "the little ones of the Rue Palatine," as they were usually called, displayed a shameless healthiness, were neither less educated, nor less elegant than their companions and enjoyed a great deal of success. One solitary defect there was, common to all three of them; they had no *dot* and everybody knew it. They knew it too. From the time that they were old enough to understand things their mother coached them: "They must take you, my little ones, just as your father took your mother, for your pretty little faces and your talents." Thus from the time of short frocks they light-heartedly engrossed themselves in this campaign of marriage that one day they would carry out. And now that they were "right in it"—to use the expression of Nanie, the sharpest of the three—they had not failed to remember that the principal object of their present life was marriage, and that all their efforts should be extended in this direction; they used them to their fullest ability. Neither their father nor their mother had practised that habit of futile reticence which does not preserve the modesty of young girls but incurs the risk of leaving them a prey to deception or betrayal. The conversations of M. and Mme. Haumont-Manin in their daughters' presence were as respectable as they were, but the three young ladies had known for a long time two important things: what pretty young girls without *dots* risk in a flirtation if they are weak, and what, on the other hand, their male partner risks if they are firm and

careful. Their heads had not been stuffed with the stupid idea that it is wrong to wish to please the man that one desires for a husband, that it is immodest to admit to him that he pleases you. They were starting life thoroughly resolved to win for themselves a fiancé to their liking, and to spare no pains in order to succeed. It was their career; they entered upon it with concentration, energy and delight, as a profession that one loves, for which one has gifts and from which one expects much. Yvonne had been first in the field, Yvonne, the eldest and the prettiest of the three, the queen of every ball at which she showed herself, besides having been asked in marriage four times in her first season: she had refused every one, in love as she was with Guy Croze and too honourable to seek to detach him from Berthe, her cousin, whom Guy preferred. She had suffered gracefully, gaily, if one can use the expression; with a background of hope, with a presentiment that in the end she would get him, not concealing her feelings from her sisters and even letting them be divined by Guy with an honourable simplicity. Then, it was Nanie who suddenly declared herself in love with M. Lecœur who was getting on for forty, who was not good-looking, but whose lectures at the Sorbonne on "The Revolution in the Provinces" were assailed every Tuesday by three hundred hats of the best make, covering the heads of young women and young girls quite blind with admiration. M. Lecœur, by an accident that he had not looked for, had become a fashionable lecturer. That year at his closing lesson a plot had been arranged among his admirers; each had brought a large bunch of Toulouse violets, and the lecturer had been forced to speak behind a florist's

bulging basket. To get nearer her idol, Nanie availed herself of the university *camaraderie*: Madame Haumont-Manin, who had immediately been made a confidante, invited M. Lecœur to the house. He knew Nanie already as his most brilliant pupil and he was flattered at being admitted to terms of familiarity with a man like Professor Haumont-Manin; the charm of the Rue Palatine acted on him as on everybody else who entered its precincts. "My little affair is going well enough," admitted that nice French plum of a Nanie, who was becoming pretty through happiness.

And so, on this particular day, in these gloomy apartments, which none the less had an air of reception about them, two out of the three young hearts were beating hopefully; Alice alone expected no guest who might touch her's. Alice, up till now, was one of those young girls who are amused by the society of young people, who receive their homage as a just due, whom compliments, even if they are a little daring, do not startle—but whom an instinctive resistance, a kind of nervous modesty, protects from the most timid advance: a type that the new French education, in which the mingling of the two sexes is accepted, has produced, and which was ignorant of its own existence in the days of long ago. In different degrees, Josette Croze and Berthe Haumont-Segré belonged to that category. Girls such as these will remain indefinitely unassailable if they never meet love on their path; they are not to be tamed by flirtation nor even by the compensations of money and position in marriage. On the other hand, the day they fall in love they will not allow any one to fetter their destiny. Alone of this trio—Berthe,

Alice and Josette—the last had arrived at this dangerous crisis.

In spring and in summer, more precisely from May to September, there were, at the apartments in the Rue Palatine, days in which for twenty glorious minutes everything became beautiful. Towards six o'clock, the sun insinuating its rays between the left wing of the ancient seminary and the church towers, struck the two drawing-room windows obliquely. Then the mouldings of the wainscoting on the walls, the edges of the joists at the bottom, the old gold about the mirrors, the limpidness of pictures by great masters, the graceful curves of the old furniture became lit up and animated. And then (an unheard-of thing) it was lively in their apartments for a reason apart from the youth, the charm and the laughter of the three sisters. When they were at home at this particular time, they never allowed the glittering visitor to escape without saluting him on his way and, usually, while they became intoxicated by his furtive appearance, the bell of St. Sulpice sounded six times running, from the steeple to the left, the great sonorous beads of the hour.

To-day the six strokes punctuated, gravely, slowly, disdainfully, a Neapolitan melody, at once nonchalant and ironical, that was being sung by the poignant contralto of Sandra accompanied at the piano by Jacques Corbellier. The sunlight of six o'clock outlined with merciless precision the feminine contours of Emmeline Corbellier, the purple shade of her rouge and by an odd effect of refraction caused the artificial ruddiness of her hair to seem grey. Sensitive to this enervating music, so lulling, so inviting, Emmeline forgot to stiffen her bust, to keep in her

waist line, to extend the muscles of her chin; she had become an unenviable object, an old woman ludicrously disguised. On a long, low sofa, Guy Croze and M. Lecœur were seated side by side very discreetly between Alice and Nanié; Yvonne was turning over the pages for Sandra. M. Lecœur's head was surmounted by a crop of blonde hair; his regular features and his complexion, which was a little too fresh, were fortunately given virility by a long beard of a darker shade. He wore a black braided jacket, a waistcoat to match, a pair of trousers of mouse-grey. His linen was very white, his tie—a breast-plate, already tied once and for all—was brand new. He wore both of his brown *suède* gloves; his feet were encased in shoes that shone with an aggressive varnish, and his eyeglass fitted tightly. Nanié, watching him with discerning sympathy, compared him to Guy with his ungloved hands, his unassertive shoes, his blue serge suit, and thought to herself, "Bah! I will dress him; it will take me only one season."

In the meantime, standing alone in front of a window beside Loute Corbellier, Josette Croze evoked, more than ever, the young Egyptian girl of the bas-relief. Josette Croze, her camelia-like complexion tinged by a ray of sunshine, a double spangle of gold in her wonderful eyes, around which the lids seemed to hover like brown butterflies, aroused by a perfect flood of renewed beauty the admiration of Madame Haumont-Manin. A circumspect teacher as she was, that lady thought to herself: "There is a little one, who is too pretty at this moment; love prowls close to her heart, you may be sure." The last refrain of the melody was sounding; Yvonne was leaving the

piano where she had been turning over the pages. Jacques was striking the chords announcing the finale, and the six o'clock sun was no longer under the wainscots which took on their ordinary severity, that of a dull red which became paler every moment.

Then, in this semi-darkness, scarcely allowing the applause time to mark the end of the previous song, Sandra and Jacques began to sing together, while Yvonne went to sit down beside Guy. Jacques' voice was a light tenor, almost a soprano; it had little volume, but a delightful timbre and a faultless precision; he had worked hard for two months under the direction of Sandra. They sang a Sicilian duet by Lamponi: the eternal amorous conflict between Horace and Lydia, that jealous love which takes on the mask of spite and threatens a rupture, only to culminate in the languor of desire and in the voluptuousness of a kiss. Music not endowed with genius, but which exhaled tenderness and warmth, doubtless banal to any one who heard it a second time, it none the less laid traps the first time for the ear and deceived one's taste. And then the voices that sang it, answered each other, harmonized, blended together so exquisitely; and, in short, the listeners, from the discerning mistress of the house down to the prudent M. Lecœur, realized thoroughly that these two beautiful singing children were talking genuinely one to the other across the insipidness of words. Their emotion, their desire, still unconfessed, threw so voluptuous a languor into this sonorous air that, as Madame Haumont-Manin murmured into the ear of Guy Croze, "It was delightful, but a little indecent." When they left the piano, after the exaltation of those last bars in which their voices had been, as it were,

interlaced, penetrated, possessed, and stood there side by side with their backs to the piano, this Perugino virgin and this admirable youth, in appearance scarcely less a woman than she, they were greeted with "Bravos" of real sincerity. They had communicated to their intimate audience the thrill of sunlit voluptuousness, of love beside blue gulfs, between red rocks, under the verdant shadow of immortal trees.

"My dear young lady," exclaimed Madame Haumont-Manin as she kissed Sandra, "you have a fortune in that throat of yours. If I were in your place I should go on the stage."

"Don't suggest that to her," Jacques protested. "We wish to keep her!"

Sandra thanked him, her beautiful glance lingering on him as she said—

"I am too pleased with my pupils, Monsieur Jacques and Mademoiselle Loute, to think of anything else."

Madame Corbellier sought compliments for her son.

"Jacques has made great progress, hasn't he?"

"Immense," answered Madame Haumont-Manin, who, in spite of her appearance of a plump, worthy lady, by no means disdained irony; "I am sure, my good Emmeline, that this Mademoiselle Ceroni will take him very far. Now let us have some refreshments. What do you say? *After all these artistic emotions . . ."

The dining-room of the Rue Palatine, from the moment that the passing six o'clock brilliance had disappeared, was nothing more than a well of shadow. But the rival fairy of this glorious visitor, the powerful and docile fairy, who carries also flame at the end of his metal hair, suddenly illumined this dark cave with a luminousness ingeniously manipulated by feminine

hands to make the most of the delicate complexions of women. At this moment, seated at a table loaded with dainties that she ate with a remorseful greediness, Emmeline Corbellier became almost young again; her beauty had been restored to her for a moment. In the meantime M. Lecœur was helping himself gratefully to his special caracks on a plate offered to him by Nanie. Josette, apart from them all and absorbed in her own inner dream, attracted the attention of Loute, who was sitting opposite; and, in order to spare herself a real conversation, questioned her about her school-lessons. Jacques occupied himself in paying attention to Sandra, in the form of compliments of assured preciousness; Alice, free and light-hearted as she was, employed herself in attending to her guests and serving them. Yvonne and Guy, however, after merely moistening their lips over a cup of tea and nibbling a little cake, returned to the drawing-room, where the lights were not lit, and where they were left alone. They spoke in a low tone. Guy said—

"I have spent some days in asking myself every morning if I should not take a little cyanide in my laboratory by way of early breakfast. Would you believe that in these moments I compelled myself not to think of you, just because I knew well that if I leaned on you I would become myself again and things would be all right with me? But I wished to suffer. I avoided even Josette, because I knew well that she also would bring me to you."

"Dear Jo!"

Guy continued in a naïve egoism that was thoroughly masculine—

"What Josette told me about Berthe and you—how you were and are much the more lovely—I used to

hate in advance. The comedy that I played at Val d'Anay that evening when I hung about you and appeared to have forgotten all about Berthe was horrible to me."

"So it was a comedy, was it?" said Yvonne, who could hardly keep back her tears. He took her hand and pressed it.

"Yes, it was one. . . . I was thinking only of the other that evening. And then, suddenly, one night I woke up; I felt an intense physical pain, something that must be like angina pectoris: one is stifling, so that one imagines that the cavity of the chest will give way under the pressure. . . . At the same instant I saw—as clearly as with my own eyes—Berthe enfolded in the arms of the Englishwoman, as at Val d'Anay, when she ran away from me. And I felt that that was all the same to me; that it made me laugh, that I was exorcised. My physical pain gradually passed, and all the rest of the night I did not wish to go to sleep again, so that I might think of you. How shall I express it? I bathed my thoughts in the memory of you."

Yvonne sighed.

"I have scarcely any pride left."

"Yvonne, dear little Yvonne, I wholly agree with Josette . . . you are a hundred times prettier and more worthy to be loved."

She lowered her head, at once happy and humiliated, but she had an anxiety in her heart that she wished at all costs to express. She did her best, became confused, wept a little, and burst into peals of laughter. Guy finally realized that she was suffering at the idea of being the poor one robbing the rich husband of her rich cousin.

Guy, who had been amused by her embarrassment, became serious again.

"Listen to me, Yvonne. Do you remember that last year papa wished to make me marry an enormous fortune, a million francs a year? I had only to say 'Yes,' and I could have appropriated a young Brazilian who, for that matter, was not at all repulsive."

"Nina de Oras?"

"Exactly. But my heart was adamant. I continued to cling to Berthe, and her twelve hundred thousand francs, you may be sure, did not affect my decision very heavily. You know that. On the other hand, I know very well that you have refused people beside whom I cut a very poor figure. Now that's it, isn't it? It's settled; we laugh at '*dots*,' both of us, don't we? We are going to make our fortune together, isn't it so?"

She smiled without answering. He leaned over her and said almost into her ear—

"I have been a miserable fool; forgive me. You do me a favour in accepting me that I don't deserve."

"And if you catch fire again for Berthe?"

"No," said he.

He searched for her lips, and she did not refuse them. Ever since she had been old enough to think, she had regarded Guy in the light of her fiancé. Without her knowing it, it was this consent of long standing which sealed Guy's decision in a healthy warmth of passion and swept aside, as so much smoke, the memory of the rebellious one.

Madame Corbellier, with Loute, Jacques and

Sandra, was the first to leave the drawing-room of the Rue Palatine. The Havana-coloured car was waiting for them below, standing in front of the apse of St. Sulpice. The clear serenity of a spring twilight that they found outside was a happy surprise for all four of them. Emmeline Corbellier had plotted with her naïve trickery to meet Croze at the place of their usual interviews. Croze made these more and more rare, alleging the pressure of overwork, alleging the danger of being recognized. Had not the newspapers popularised the face of the new Under-Secretary for War, the organizer of the Fourth Arm? Emmeline's plan for getting rid of her children and governess consisted this time in leaving the car at the Pont de la Concorde; from there, "in order to take exercise, she would return on foot as far as the Rue Montaigne." Nobody made any objection; no one proposed accompanying her; it was the custom. Emmeline would say: "I prefer to do my *walking* in my own way, at my own pace, stopping when I wish to stop." Sandra merely observed—

"Does Madame remember that some tennis-shoes must be bought for Loute? Her present ones are worn out."

"Very well, my little Sandra; you will take Loute to John's as soon as you have dropped me."

At the corner of the quay opposite the Palais Bourbon the Havana-coloured car divested itself of its voluminous mistress, after which it carried Sandra, Loute and Jacques towards the boulevards. Seated opposite to Loute, who, as usual, was silent and observant, Sandra and Jacques began to speak at once of their mutual success. Then they said a few words about the apartments in the Rue Palatine, expressed

their preference for this or that of the three little ones, and amused themselves at the expense of M. Lecœur. The presence of Loute did not prevent their conversation from becoming more intimate; on the contrary, when Jacques by chance found himself alone with Sandra, he showed uneasiness and hurriedly took refuge in music. For both of them music was their real language, and they communicated through it much better than through words. Jacques' nerves, without this assistance, could not have borne the presence, the contact, of this beautiful young girl; but music acted, so to speak, as an anæsthetic, and the charm of the feminine presence glided insidiously into his heart, blended with the musical emotion of which he was whole-heartedly the slave.

And as Sandra was so much his superior in music, their relation had begun to take the form of her domination over him; she thought nothing of treating him like a pupil, and saying to him: "This is bad," or "You haven't worked." She taught him even in a harsher and less smiling manner than she did Loute; and Jacques enjoyed this harshness, this action of a will on his. Already this influence had passed beyond his music lessons. Words dropped by Sandra, preferences that she had expressed, were beginning to modify Jacques' habits. He saw less and less of his dear "idealistic poet," Georges d'Amblin, and Baron Lartisan and Carl Vorberg, nicknamed Carlin—the whole equivocal circle of his intimates—because Sandra did not conceal the fact that they displeased her. Again, he was beginning to addict himself to sports, which he had disdained for a long time, because she declared a preference for men who were active and strong in their limbs. She herself, at

tennis, was beaten only by Josette. Not a word had been uttered between them that savoured of amorous intrigue, but both experienced the need of the other's presence, and the two hours of music that they spent daily together had for them all the savour of a rendezvous. Madame Corbellier fostered this growing intimacy. Jacques remained more and more at home with her, and took part more and more in all the comings and goings of his mother and sister. That is all that she saw in it. M. Corbellier—the confidant of Loute—was doubtless better informed, but who in the whole house thought of consulting M. Corbellier?

Jacques accompanied Loute and Sandra to John's and while Loute was trying on tennis-shoes talked with the Italian. She showed him some boxing-gloves, and urged him to take lessons.

"It will do you good. It is a fine sport—better than tennis. If women could go in for it, I should certainly take it up."

She stopped speaking; he was looking at her more fixedly, more boldly, than usual. Sandra had created a sensation among the customers, and even among the employees of the shop. Jacques, with a vanity that was quite feminine, felt proud of showing himself with her; she belonged to him, and really she paid attention only to him. Vanity, which lay uppermost in the satisfaction he had experienced just now at the Haumont-Manins when they had been applauded together, created in his heart a kind of puerile sympathy for her, and this sympathy appeared so plainly on his face that Sandra stopped short, astonished, intimidated. Then he said to her—

"Go on speaking; I am watching your mouth move."

And such a phrase, uttered by Jacques, was such an extravagance that Sandra became red, could not find a word to say, and was obliged, in order to keep herself in countenance, to take refuge in Louie, who was forcing with effort her thin, flat feet into the white canvas shoes.

CHAPTER II

THE CHAPERON

As they passed the entrance to the double suite of apartments, Mag saw Josette so pale, so nearly fainting, that the door had scarcely closed before she seized her under the armpits and supported her to the sofa of the little sitting-room. At four o'clock, towards the end of May, the narrow room which had been dark and suffocating in February when Mag had received her friends, now welcomed the two visitors into a discreet white light that filtered through venetian blinds. There was no dampness, but a freshness so delightful that Josette could not resist a feeling of physical well-being at finding a refuge there, after the glare of the streets, after the anxiety during the drive in the *fiacre*, and the excitement of alighting in front of the door. At the same moment a smelling-bottle that Mag applied to her nostrils revived her; her cheeks regained their colour, but she was not yet able to speak.

"Really, Josette," Mag whispered, "you had better go back. I will receive Count Adolf, and tell him that you were prevented from coming. Shall I? Make up your mind at once; in a few minutes he will be here."

"No." Josette, who was becoming more herself, made a negative sign.

Her glance, at first uneasy, distrustful, had wan-

dered round the room. She experienced relief at seeing nothing in it that suggested the suspected mystery of a rendezvous in a novel. It was a little sitting-room, nicely furnished like many others, such as big Parisian upholsterers furnish for customers who don't haggle. Not even light refreshments were on the table, but on it there was a large sheaf of lilliums, Josette's favourite flower. The bedroom door had been pushed open, but neither toilet-table nor bed were visible. All these delicate attentions were not the work of Letzling, but of Mag, who, knowing the restive soul of her pupil, had made a preliminary inspection of the double apartments that very morning.

Seeing Josette almost herself again, the German had the audacity to reprimand her in a friendly way, and administered, as it were, a rebuff to her amour-propre.

"You don't know what you want, my Josette, or rather, like all Frenchwomen, you have no courage in love. You must be loved without any risk on your own part."

"You say that to me here?" protested Josette.

"Here? But you are running no risk, none at all. Listen to me. Now that I see you in such suspense I am going to tell you what I never told you before. All the worse, if you are going to despise me afterwards, but I am anxious about your peace of mind."

She took her pupil's two hands in hers and looked her in the eyes.

"You are too innocent to understand me through half-words. But there is a time for innocence and a time for being a woman. I told you that this suite of rooms has another exit in the Rue de Châteaudun.

If by some impossible accident we were tracked you would escape by it, under the protection of a safe escort who from now on is keeping watch in the other suite of rooms."

"Who is it?" asked Josette, more curious now than frightened.

"I am going to tell you. Let me finish my explanation. If they were to track us, Letzling would remain behind after you had gone, and would call me, for I shall also keep watch on the other side. And it is I who would be found with him. Do you grasp now that you are running no risk?"

"But," persisted Josette, "who is this person who will keep watch with you in the apartments on the other side?"

Mag answered: "Bolski."

She let go of Josette's hands, as the girl recoiled from her. Suddenly in her brain a problem was being solved. Things not understood up till now, became clear to her, but with a vividness that was infinitely sad. After a silence she murmured—

"Why, are you not Bolski's wife?"

Mag gave a sombre laugh. "Eleven years ago his family were against it, because I was only a simple governess. Now that he is ruined and hunted by his creditors, it is he who refuses to bring me his debts as a marriage settlement."

Both of them waited in suspense. Three knocks sounded, one long and two short. The young girl's hand clutched the governess's knee.

"Shall I open?" asked Mag.

"No . . . I will."

Josette rose to her feet, filled with all her old courage. Mag said hurriedly—

"I am going to the other side. In the room next to this there is a bookcase, which is only a false door. In order to call me you will only have to tap against the books as one taps at a door."

Three unequal knocks resounded once more. Mag stole away. Josette went to open the door, pale and determined.

They were now facing each other, she sitting on the corner of the sofa, and he on a chair. They had exchanged merely words of cold politeness; and their emotion at finding themselves alone in this way for the first time in their lives, behind a bolted door, betrayed itself only by this coldness.

"I hope that I have not kept you waiting?"

"Oh no; I have only just come."

"Mag was here?"

"Yes; she has just left me."

Suddenly Josette made a gesture of irritation.

"Ah, but it is wrong, what we are doing. I should be less disgusted with myself if I had run away with you openly, courageously . . ."

Letzling protested: "I am not conscious that we are doing anything wrong; but since my presence irritates . . ."

He rose, and if she had allowed him to do so, he would have gone away with a sense of relief, so painful was this *tête-à-tête* in which he dared not even utter a word of tenderness for fear of offending Josette. It was she who held him back; remembering Mag's words, she was ashamed of lacking courage in love.

"Stay," she said. "I am nervous; forgive me. I try in vain to tell myself that it is just as if I were receiving you in the drawing-room in the Avenue

Velasquez. What grieves me is deceiving my people, Guy especially, my dear Guy, who has such confidence in me! It is deceiving him that troubles me; it would have been much better if I had confessed it to him."

"Guy is on your father's side, against me. He doesn't like me."

"He never will like the man that I want to marry. Guy is jealous of me; you know that quite well."

Her face relaxed into a smile as she said this; Letzling came a little nearer and she gave him her hand; they began to talk more at their ease. The young military attaché, however, remained on his guard, for he knew well her restive moods. He stroked her long, cool hands without pressing them; he was afraid of displeasing her even by looking at her too eagerly; his self-restraint kept from him even the shadow of passion. She, on the contrary, now that she was reassured, now that she felt her power, and that on a word from her he would leave her alone, became astonished at a strange happiness, at once overwhelming and ardent, that swept over her. Up to this hour love had been for her something of the brain or of the will, nothing more: a face, a figure, a male intelligence pleased her; one wished to meet, and in order to do so one was ready to overcome obstacles; marriage, life in common, children—these were the distant goal towards which one was tending. This brought anguish, insomnia, tears, almost a swoon of happiness, at a chance meeting, a vivid blush of pleasure at a glance exchanged in secret. But it all passed, as though it were purely "heart and head" as with the heroines of the classic drama. . . . There are not many Aricies in the first quarter of the twentieth century in Parisian society; there are some,

however, who are preserved by circumstances from all sensual emotion until the eve of marriage. The protection of a rather jealous elder brother is one of the most efficacious of these circumstances. Josette, capable of allowing herself to be led to a rendezvous by the cunning influence of her governess, was an Aricie. She did not understand the nature of the risk that she was running, but, in advance and without understanding it, this risk inspired her with more horror than fear. Now, sitting quite close to this handsome young man, whose blue eyes avoided her, whose clean-shaven lips, so firm in outline, uttered words so respectful that tenderness itself evaporated from them, whose hands rested against her own with a sort of anxious devotion—that is what began to circulate a mysterious electricity through the network of her nerves, that is what seemed to rouse a warmer life in her veins. She, no more than he, was troubled with desire, for she was ignorant even of the nature of what she might have been able to desire; but what positive event of her amorous life could ever transform her more than this infinite expectation in which her whole being became exalted? This infinite expectation, which at every moment seemed to her at once overwhelmed and reviving—she gave herself up to it, without anxiety, without distrust. Letzling reassured her, and he was so obviously her slave! And it was her hands that leaned more heavily on the palms of the young man; it was her eyes whose willing magnetism drew and held a glance which sought to escape. A Valmont would have foreseen that this artless being had no more strength, nor even the consciousness of resisting; that in advance she was conquered. Happily, Letzling had nothing of a Valmont

about him. His adventures in the world, up till now, had scarcely gone beyond the ordinary common round. He had, however, an intuition of the danger that Josette was running, and as he loved her sincerely, as he wished her to be his wife, he feared for her and for himself. He pressed her slender hands in a grasp that was too rough to seem a caress, laid them on her knees, rose to his feet, and, approaching the window that had remained open behind the drawn venetian blinds, drew long breaths of the fresh air. Josette watched him, disappointed in something, but without knowing what; disappointed, and yet submissive to his will, for already women's imperious gratitude for the adorable emotion that they have felt was piercing her heart. She called him, with a tender sweetness that he had never heard put into his name before—

* "Adolf."

And as he perceived this new tenderness, this other Josette, appearing for the first time from underneath the little Amazon, so virginal and so authoritative, whose keen charm he had felt so long, this perception made him master of himself, sure of himself. An affectionate pity combined with the refined egotism of the fiancé, the egotism that jealously reserves virginal innocence until the day of marriage. He dared to return to the sofa now. He sat down beside Josette. He took her in his arms. Far from resisting, she did not even tremble; she had become a slave; languorous in a delightful expectation; he murmured, without knowing exactly what he said—

"I adore you; trust me, my little wife; I love you. Trust me."

He lulled her thus for some time with words and

embraces. He told her all that he had never dared to tell her before when they met in society, for he had always dreaded her virginal irony, so easily roused. He told her that he loved her with all the puerile eagerness of a schoolboy; that he had surrounded himself with all the insignificant tokens of her that he had been able to collect—*cotillon* favours, a cluster of artificial violets taken from her waist, the end of an aigrette that had fallen from a hat, a glove button. He confessed to her that she had frightened him a little with her cold and determined air, and that twenty times after those meetings which had been so longed for he had returned home in a state of despair, convinced that she did not love him, and that she would never love anybody, convinced that she was a daughter of Paris, disdainful and glacial; that she wished to flirt, but nothing more. He implored her to tell him that this was not true, that she loved him . . . and for the first time he obtained this word, that she had never pronounced, that she pronounced here with a kind of mystic voluptuousness, that she repeated slowly several times, as though to exhaust its new savour—

“Yes, I love you. I love you. I love you.”

And as, together with love, that need of security, of certainty, which the feminine heart, fashioned by thousands of years of servitude, never separates from love, was revealed to her.

“You will not leave me, Adolf? You will not discourage me? You are risking so many vexations. . . . No, don’t make promises. . . . I am sure . . .”

But Letzling wished to promise and to assure her of his willing fidelity; he found words so sincere in their ardour that Josette’s heart was quite comforted

by them. Sure of being more than ever allied and being able to count the one on the other, even in the most extreme emergencies, they spoke without bitterness of the obstacles that obtruded themselves between them.

"Papa is mad about politics," said Josette. "You know that his name is mentioned, among many others, for the Presidency of the Republic. Neither mamma nor Guy nor I believe in it, nor do we wish it. But as for him, it's his obsession. He would pass over our dead bodies to enter the Élysée. You may imagine how much my happiness weighs with him! I can die an old maid, rather than that a paragraph in the *Radical* should be able to say that Mademoiselle Croze is flirting with the Triple Alliance!"

On his side, Adolf had been wounded by Croze's hostility. Up till then he had not confessed it to Josette, but now he told her all. Well, his chief, the Ambassador of his Apostolic Majesty, had informed him of it; he was a great Croatian noble, belonging to a family which had several times intermarried with his own, and who treated him with paternal severity. He had appealed to his sense of pride, and had said to him: "I have had the humiliation of receiving here a French deputy, and *not even a Member of the Right*, who begged me to have your attentions to his daughter stopped." Adolf related this with a woeful mien that was amusing enough. He did not add how the Ambassador had treated the French deputy, or what he had said on the possibility of an alliance of a Letzling with this uncouth democrat!

Thus they exchanged all their reasons for fearing the future, and yet, by this very exchange, gained fresh confidence. They felt themselves equal to any-

thing. Neither the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador nor Croze, the Under-Secretary of State for War, should hinder them from belonging to each other, from being husband and wife. That is what they were assured of through a strong inner conviction, born of the certitude that they loved each other, and that love is invincible.

The English clock struck four urgent peals after a deluge of preliminary chimes. Josette uttered an exclamation—

“Four o'clock! I must call Mag. We are to have tea at the Ritz with Madame Corbellier and the three little Haumont-Manins.”

The charm was broken; the grip of every-day social necessities reasserted itself. Letzling, with his walking-stick and gloves, assumed once more an attitude of deference. Josette, uneasy about the time, was nervous. They separated hurriedly in the little dark antechamber. Adolf's lips brushed the tips of Josette's fingers, and the closed door separated them without their having even arranged for another meeting. What love affairs have not experienced these inexplicable panics, these departures that resemble flights, this haste to leave each other, followed immediately by remorse and by anger against oneself? Alone in the sitting-room with the lilies, Josette wept. Letzling's departure had not suspended the mysterious expectation that had taken possession of her while he was near. But now this expectation was no longer every minute so strong and overwhelming; she tortured herself with forebodings. Josette, usually so self-controlled, so guarded against neurasthenia, not only by her good health and her pride, but also by hygiene, sports and the care of her personal appearance,

Josette gave way to a fit of nerves as an Emmeline Corbellier might have done. Face down on the sofa, her forehead buried in the cushions, her limbs quivering, she sobbed. She was angry with Letzling, both because he had come and because he had gone. If she had not been pressed for time, she would have remained there, weeping, twisting her slender, arched feet and her fine hands until night.

But she had to hasten and find Mag again. What had become of Mag? No sound could be heard, either in the apartments or in the court outside. Josette rose, dried her eyes with a determined gesture, and passed into the next room. Darkness reigned there, heavy curtains being drawn over the only window. She turned a switch, and a subdued rosy light lit up the recess of the alcove; the bed was visible, covered with its counterpane; so, too, on one side, was the shining crockery and the knicknacks in the dressing-room. A deep sense of shame made the young girl's cheeks grow red as she thought: "Adolf knew that this room was beside us." But suddenly she was roused from her emotion. They were talking quite close on the other side of the partition which faced her, exactly behind this book-case, on which Mag had enjoined her to knock. She approached it, ready to do so. The increasing sound of voices stopped her: Mag's voice and that of a man. They seemed to be quarrelling.

"Mag and Bolski," thought Josette.

She no longer dared to knock. Through the door, covered with books, she heard Bolski exclaim—

"If I wished, I could find plenty of women to pull me out of the business."

And Mag replied, half angry, half tender—

"Ah, you villain, I know well that they all want you, but be careful."

Josette caught no more than a whispering, in which she recognized only some names: the name of Rosalie Boisset, the name of her father, whom they also called "the Under-Secretary." Then an outburst—

"That! No, I will never do it. Don't count on it. . . ."

Bolski sneered.

"What scruples! Ask your master, who knows how many French governesses are at work in that way in Germany."

"But I tell you that I shall have the fifteen hundred francs. The day after to-morrow—won't that do?"

"Yes, but it's a tight fit."

"I shall see Rosalie in the morning, the day after to-morrow. And now you must go. Josette will be coming to knock."

There were footsteps, hurried comings and goings, then the sound of a kiss, very lingering. A door was opened and closed, and after that complete silence.

"Mag is alone," thought Josette.

The words that she had overheard, without understanding anything of them, troubled her less than the brutal familiarity revealed by the tone of the lovers. And before separating, their kiss so long-drawn! . . . She saw Letzling again, in the act of leaving her, so correct, so abrupt. Her hands closed limply over the books. But she could not make up her mind to knock. She disliked even catching a glimpse of the room in which she had penetrated to the intimacy of Mag and Bolski. She returned to her seat on the sofa in the sitting-room with the liliums. Her insistent imagination substituted her own picture for that of the

German, and, in spite of herself, she conjured up Adolf close to her as Bolski was close to Mag. She suffered from this picture of imagination as from physical anguish, and the distracted expectation that she had experienced in Letzling's presence swept over her again, but this time more precise and more dominating. Her will was in no way broken down; she was still the little revolting Amazon. But love was now no longer a complete mystery to her. And if the forbidden fruit had not yet tempted her hand, at least she had sat under the shade of the Tree of Knowledge.

Mag, completely dressed, ready to leave, found her sitting there motionless, her eyes bathed in tears. At the first glance they exchanged the governess saw that her pupil was not angry with her. But she knew her too well not to perceive her confusion and her grief. She sat down beside her without touching her.

"Josette," she said, "at this moment you despise me. And if you wish it, as soon as we return to the house I shall find an excuse for asking your mother to terminate my engagement. I am not going to inflict myself on you."

Josette made a gesture of protest.

"On the other hand, nothing is easier than never to meet Baron Adolf again here."

"Ah!" said Josette, uncovering her eyes; "don't say that. I—I wish to see him."

"It depends only on you," said the German.

Josette now dared to look at her, and it was in vain for Mag to cover with a hat her blonde coils of hair, to wear a blue costume, black stockings, and shoes with patent leather toe-caps. Josette pictured her still in that other room crouching under Bolski's interminable kiss. But already the revolt of her inexperi-

enced heart was dying away; she still experienced trouble, shame, but she no longer felt disgust. The German saw her advantage, and profited by it to push forward her work of dangerous temptation.

"How has he been with you?" she asked.

"I believe that he loves me," stammered Josette.

"Well, what happened?"

She did not answer a word. Mag persisted, smiling—

"Did he kiss you? Did he take you in his arms?"

To each question Josette replied by an uncertain grimace. She ended by saying through her tears—

"We have been extremely proper, it seems to me."

"He, too? As proper as you?"

"I believe he was a little afraid of me."

Mag shrugged her shoulders.

"Do you believe that one holds a man by frightening him? Think of Guy and Berthe!"

"All the same, I cannot . . ."

Josette did not finish, but Mag understood.

"As it pleases you," she said. "It is the system of the Americans with the men who want to marry them to make them lose their heads by flirtations during which they remain strictly on the defensive. I find it more worthy to love frankly and not to haggle over one's favours. But look, we are already half-an-hour late. Put your hat on and let us be starting."

In the street, as they hurried towards the neighbouring Place Vendôme, where they were to meet Emeline Corbellier and the little Haumont-Manins, the German, divining that this was a critical time for Josette, sustained her in the trouble in which she saw her plunged. She spoke no more about Letzling, but,

as to a friend to whom one can tell everything, she spoke of Bolski and herself. She told how they had known each other—long ago at Koenigsberg—the court that he had paid her, the opposition of his parents. She told about their first meetings at the house of a married friend. She told about her first yielding. She confessed the vices of Bolski—how he was a spendthrift, a gambler and an idler.

"But he is a great artist, and I love him. And all that I have suffered, all that I still suffer, is nothing when I see him happy in my arms."

Josette listened. Like a too strong wine, these confidences insinuated themselves into her brain and heart, and diffused over them a kind of torpor; but she was no longer shocked. A woman, much more quickly than a man, destroys the simplicity of another woman. When, accompanied by her chaperon, Josette entered the large entrance-hall of the Ritz, she was still a young girl in the literal sense, but her innocence had left her.

CHAPTER III

THE ORPHANS' MONEY

PLUMP and Blonde in^o her costume of blue silk, under her hat of blue straw, a leather money-bag at her side, face and bearing a little tired—doubtless because of the fatigue of the journey from Val d'Anay to Paris,—Rosalie Boisset alighted at the Gare St. Lazare. It was two o'clock in the afternoon, one of those Parisian June days, worse than the dog days, when the asphalt of the pavements gives under one's feet, and the wooden highways seem almost to be catching fire. Around the station, horses and drivers of *fiacres* were sleeping on their stand; as for the motor-cabs, deserted by their chauffeurs, they were empty in their lines, and the taximeters were glistening. And, although the terraces of the neighbouring cafés were fairly full, the excess of light and heat imposed a half silence upon this tumultuous corner of the town.

Rosalie, while mopping her face with her handkerchief, began running to catch a motor-omnibus that had stopped, still quivering, in the middle of the road. But she had to slacken her pace immediately, quite breathless, and while she was recovering, the omnibus started. Then having consulted the station clock, she went to wake up one of the sleeping drivers.

"17 Rue Montalivet," she said.

The horse started at a trot, so slow, so lulling that

she slept during the drive and started up when, the purple face of the driver showing itself at the open door, she heard a friendly and drunken voice exclaim laughingly—

"Every one his turn, eh, my pretty one?"

She told him to wait for her and made her way towards the house. It was a quiet and comfortable dwelling in the style of Napoleon III, which, outside, had quite the appearance of apartments. The concierge's lodge looked out from underneath the entrance arch, a few steps down.

"Ah, there's Mademoiselle Rosalie," said a bulky woman with greyish hair, comfortably dressed in black, who appeared at the entrance of the lodge and began immediately to talk with unctuous volubility: "You are well, Mademoiselle? And all the family? My husband will be very sorry for being out; he has such a liking for you. My word! if I didn't know him to be so steady I should be uneasy. So you are coming to see Madame? No, Mademoiselle Berthe? Mademoiselle Berthe is out. She did not lunch at home to-day; Mademoiselle Berthe was to lunch with . . ."

"If I could only speak a minute with Mademoiselle Smith," said Rosalie, without succeeding in stopping the verbal flow of the concierge, who finished her sentence before answering the question—

"With Countess Bouhier on the other side of the water. Ah, but Miss was lunching out too, with Mademoiselle Berthe, I think. Don't wait outside, stooping down to talk to me, Mademoiselle Rosalie, that will send the blood to your head, and as for me, I shall be getting a stiff neck. All the same, you can spare a second to pay me a scrap of a visit, and if my

husband comes back while you are in the lodge he will be very pleased. There, take care, there's another step. It is a little low down, but quite light all the same, eh? And on a furnace of a-day like this there are not many cooler corners in Paris. If only the road had a little more life in it. All the same one can't complain. Sit down in the arm-chair, yes, yes, in the arm-chair, for I prefer my low chair. Mademoiselle is out now with Miss, and between you and me (she lowered her voice and came nearer to Rosalie) if you had come here yesterday, it would have been the same business, and at the end of the month, Mademoiselle Berthe and Miss are going to Noirmoutiers together. Oh, things aren't going at all well upstairs (she pointed to the ceiling) between Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle. Mademoiselle scarcely speaks to Monsieur or Madame any more, and Madame won't have anything to do with Mademoiselle Smith. For why? Ah, they say a great many things, you know. I let them go in at one ear and out at the other. When one has spent eighteen years in a house, as Antoine and I have, one isn't going to collect and hawk about silly talk."

At last she stopped for a second, divided between her sincere wish to be discreet and her desire to keep Rosalie, who was showing a wish to rise. The need of keeping her listener at all costs was the more pressing—

"They say . . . they say that Monsieur and Madame are angry with Mademoiselle Berthe for preferring Mademoiselle Smith to them, for listening only to Mademoiselle Smith. They say that Mademoiselle Smith keeps her from getting married, and that she wants to capture Mademoiselle's fortune.

Mademoiselle has a fortune in her own right, of more than a million francs, and she was of age two years ago, quite free: she herself wished it, always under the influence of the Englishwoman. The Englishwoman is a managing person, I tell you, Mademoiselle Rosalie! A distinguished woman, quite superior, about whom there is nothing to say; and in spite of the fact that she is here only as a lady that one pays by the month like you and me (that doesn't offend you, Mademoiselle Rosalie, what I am telling you?) she orders everybody about in that jargon of hers that one can scarcely understand, and every one obeys her. No, you are not getting up? Wait, I have another thing to tell you. Something quite confidential, and all the more so, because I for my part don't believe that it is true."

She left her low chair, cast a glance under the entrance arch, and closed the lodge door behind her when she returned. Then, almost in Rosalie's ear, she said—

"They say that the horses are fighting upstairs because the hay is running short in the rack!"

"Impossible!" said Rosalie. "Aren't they very rich . . . very rich?"

"My husband, who knows a great many of these gentlemen of the bank (he is employed as a supernumerary on *jours d'émission*) told me, he made me swear not to repeat it—that the affairs of the house have not been going well for the last eighteen months. They stop the leaks as well as they can. And Mademoiselle Berthe, always because the Englishwoman puts it into her head, is afraid that they are going to ask for her million to help them to stop a big leak. But I tell you again, neither my husband nor I

believe it. Everything is paid cash down here, not a tradesman is kept waiting. And then, in a big business there may be a moment of difficulties, mayn't there? and yet, in spite of that, one finds a way of . . ."

A ring at the private telephone in the lodge interrupted her. The bulky concierge ran briskly enough to the instrument. Rosalie heard this half of the conversation—

"Hullo! Yes, Madame, it is I . . . The cab in front of the door? It is Mademoiselle Rosalie's from Val d'Anay. Yes, Madame, she was asking for Mademoiselle Berthe. Oh! no, Madame, she only just arrived a second ago; I was explaining to her that Mademoiselle had gone out with her governess. Certainly, Madame, she will come up at once."

Hanging up the receiver again, Madame Antoine said to Rosalie—

"Go up quickly to see Madame. She knows that you have been here for a good time. The staircase on the left. The footman will take you there."

She accompanied her to the outer door of the lodge—

"Mum's the word about what I was telling you. Besides, when all is said and done, Antoine and I don't believe a word of it, not a word."

Madame Haumont-Segré received Rosalie in her bedroom, a large room, the two windows of which looked out on to the beautiful garden, now all radiant with its young leafage, its soft grass plots and its plumed hydrangeas. She received her stretched out on a couch. A novel was lying open on the chiffonier near her. Magazines and reviews were lying about on the carpet. Madame Haumont-Segré

after having long believed herself to be the victim of a liver complaint, suffered just now from a heart attack; she told the young girl about it at once, as she made her sit down close to her. She told her also that it was a case of an exceptional malady that the doctors could not understand and that, one after the other, they confessed their powerlessness. And Rosalie knew well that the speaker considered this incomprehensible malady a privilege, almost an ornament to her life, and that in consulting doctor after doctor, she sought in repeated consultations only to confirm her own obsession: "I am an exceptional patient." Rosalie had been unguarded enough to assure her that she looked well. She retorted with some sourness, declaring that looks went for nothing, and that she had always been pale and thin, "even at Berthe's age, and like Berthe, who resembles me terribly," and that, for the rest, she knew well that she had no organ actually damaged, but that it was just this that constituted the mystery since she was none the less ill—

"I am touched at the very roots of life, in depths to which the eyes and instruments of doctors have no access. . . . It doesn't matter, enough said about my misfortunes. They are well at Val d'Anay?"

"Yes, they are, Madame."

"Father, mother, the little boys, the little girl and the twins?"

"Yes, Madame."

"You have come to get Berthe's collection for the lottery for orphans? Don't distress yourself; you haven't made your journey for nothing. Berthe and Miss, have each done their share, they are methodical people; they forget nothing. Please take that

envelope on the mantelpiece, leaning against the candlestick to the right. Good, I have written outside a statement of its contents. Read."

"Berthe three hundred and fifty francs. Miss, a cheque for three pounds sterling on the Franco-American Bank. Madame Haumont-Segré fifty francs."

"You see that I am your worst subscriber, my poor Rosalie, and that Mademoiselle Smith is in touch with more people than I am. You mustn't be angry with me. I go nowhere; even writing tires me; how, then, could I place lottery tickets? In short, I took five for myself."

"Madame has been too kind. I thank Madame; they will be so pleased at Val d'Anay."

"Hold your envelope tightly so as not to lose it, and come a little nearer so that I can have a look at you. You, who find me looking well, you seem to me rather pale. You haven't your pretty colour any more. Ah, there it is coming back. But that is just a little fire of modesty that will be gone at once. It is the heat, I suppose? And besides that? Oh, I understand. . . . Then, they ought not to have sent you to Paris to-day."

"Oh, M. le Baron tells me not to tire myself, and so does Madame la Baronne. They told me to take a cab."

"They were perfectly right. If they had you laid up, they would not replace you in twenty-four hours. How lucky they were. It is not worth while blushing again, my little Rosalie. Governesses of your type are a species that is rapidly dying out. And if I had had the good luck to meet with a Rosalie Boisset . . ."

"Oh, how can Madame say that?" murmured Rosalie, really moved. "Madame, who has Mademoiselle Fanny, so well educated, so well brought up, so super . . ."

She did not finish the sentence. Madame Haumont-Segré sat upright with an energy and an agility so unexpected that the young girl was as startled as if she were attending a resurrection.

"Don't talk to me of Mademoiselle Smith," said the revived lady. "You see in what a state I am? She is the cause of it. I ridicule her education, (she can't even speak French correctly) her fine airs and her distinction. If the French were not so idiotically disarmed before foreigners, a woman like that would have been arrested, yes, arrested. Ah! to think that there used to be *lettres de cachet* and that in the old days one could have imprisoned people who are too clever to commit technical crimes, but who are more noxious than criminals. . . . To think that one can do nothing! That one is at their mercy! That one is consumed with despair, even to the point of meditating disappearance. . . . Yes, Rosalie, my husband and I have thought of it. We have been robbed of our daughter, in our own house, before our eyes, in our presence. She has become changed to us. She used to be tender, she has been made frigid. She used to be generous, she has been made avaricious. They have made a foreigner of her towards us. . . . What am I saying? rather an enemy, who would consent to the ruin of her father and mother, rather than make this other one knit her brows, rather than upset her wicked calculations. But I don't know why I am saying all this to you. . . ."

She feverishly arranged the cushions at the back of

the couch and stretched herself out again, quite shaken with a fit of shivering. Her eyelids were moist, and she bit her lips. Rosalie, standing near her, tried to keep herself in countenance. This silence seemed even more awkward to her than the outburst of a few minutes before.

"You must go, you must go, my little Rosalie," said Madame Haumont-Segré at last. "Continue your rounds, I must not keep you. Leave me to my troubles; I was wrong to speak to you about them. Keep it to yourself. Go now, and don't lose the envelope."

Rosalie, whose sensitive heart was touched by all misfortunes, murmured—

"Poor Madame."

"Yes, you may well say 'Poor Madame!' But there is nothing to be done. Au revoir, my child. My kind regards to your employers."

Rosalie, as she went out, was lucky enough to pass in front of the lodge while the bulky Madame Antoine was engaged in a long conference with a tradesman. She was able to make her escape, re-enter her cab, and continue the calls which were inscribed on her list. It was a matter of collecting the sum total for tickets sold by the Parisian friends of Baroness Ropart d'Amey for the benefit of the Employment Institute for Orphans. And so she traversed the eighth arrondissement, the neighbourhood of the Parc Monceau, touched a point in Passy, came out again in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, jogging along in this miserable rolling box, the horse and driver of which seemed equally somnambulists. She herself would often go to sleep between two calls, a sleep in which there was no rest, an evil sleep of

nightmares, during which she would groan at the jolts of the cab. When she managed to wake up completely, her round face, shaped to express naïve happiness, remained drawn. She moved her lips without speaking; at moments she cried. But bravely she continued her circuit, rang at doors, climbed flights of stairs, endured waits in ante-rooms and occasionally rebuffs from tardy depositors, those who had not yet sold all their tickets. Towards five o'clock, as she had predicted (for she was wonderfully methodical) she had finished her list with the exception of the Corbelliers and the Crozes. But she was going to meet Sandra and Mag, who were bringing the contributions of their respective houses at a quarter-past five, in a quiet little tea-room in the Choiseul Arcade. On the way from the Faubourg Saint-Germain to the Arcade, Rosalie, now wide awake, made up her accounts. The money-bag contained two thousand one hundred and eighty-five francs. "Mag and Sandra will bring me at least twenty-five louis between them!" She had a joyful minute as she imagined her return that evening to Val d'Anay, and all this money spread out on the table before M. le Baron, Madame la Baronne and the children.

The tea-room of the Choiseul Arcade, discovered by Mag, was often chosen as the meeting-place of the three friends, because it was but little frequented and they could talk freely there. It had the size and rather the appearance of a mere creamery, but one was able to drink quite good tea there in solitude, restful at a time when the other tea-rooms of Paris were gorged with people. Mag was alone at the rendezvous when Rosalie arrived with her money-bag hanging at her

side. A middle-aged man at a neighbouring table was hurrying over a cup of chocolate. The two governesses kissed each other.

"Sandra is not sure about being free," said the German. "She told me to begin without waiting for her. She will certainly not be here before the half-hour. Two teas with muffins, that's it, isn't it?"

While a rather smart waitress was serving them, Mag eyed the money-bag.

"Much boodle in there?"

"More than two thousand francs," said Rosalie, with some pride, "and you, what are you bringing me?"

"Almost three hundred, and Sandra has as much."

"Oh, I am glad."

"What an extraordinary kid you are," murmured the German, "to take it to heart like that. So you really believe in this work? You believe that this money will get to the orphans?"

"Where else will it go? You don't mean to say that M. le Baron . . ."

"No, no, don't get excited; nobody dreams of suspecting the honesty of the Baron. But these charity organizations are usually so badly managed . . ."

At these bitter reflections, Rosalie's childish face lost its look of pleasure. And it was only then that Mag noticed that Rosalie looked very ill.

"Why have your eyes got dark circles round them and why those pale lips?" she asked. "Are you ill? You used to tell us that ordinarily you weren't conscious of your health at all."

The man sipping chocolate had just gone, and Mag and Rosalie were quite alone in the little room.

The smart waitress after serving them with tea had returned to a kind of cupboard in which she was preparing some refreshments.

Rosalie with her eyes on her cup, which she had not touched, made no answer, and Mag went on—

"But really, little one, what is the matter with you?"

Then the great burden of grief, the heavy despair that had been suppressed all through this wearying day, and also for so many days before this, burst out into a deluge of tears, a storm of sobs, so loud that the rather smart waitress stretched her head and neck out of the cupboard and then withdrew quickly. Mag saw that Rosalie was broken down; her face was buried in her hands, and she was so shaken by her grief that her hair was coming down. And all at once she understood.

"Calm yourself," she said. "If Sandra were to come or any one else for that matter! There is nothing to make you lose your head. Dry your eyes; look, here is a clean handkerchief. . . . There, do up your hair, the clasp is falling out. And now drink a little hot tea to make you feel better."

Rosalie obeyed, sniffing like a little girl, her sobs becoming less and less violent. Mag's energy gave her a feeling of comfort. And now that her weighty secret was shared, she experienced a sensation of relief. When she had docilely drunk her cup of tea, without a word, Mag took her hand, and asked—

"In the first place, are you sure?"

Rosalie made a face that expressed doubt.

"How long have you been uneasy?"

In a low tone as if in the confessional box, Rosalie replied—

"It is quite two months ago."

"And *he* . . . does he know?"

Rosalie inclined her head in the affirmative.

"What does he say?"

She could only stammer out—

"He is too good to me."

"Well, I don't suppose he's going to put you out of doors! But don't you know anything about anything?"

Rosalie murmured in a tone so low that Mag scarcely heard it—

"M. le Baron says, that that is even worse."

The German gave a dry laugh, which she checked at once so as not to pain her friend—

"Since it is he who is directing you," she said, "what does he intend to do with you?"

"M. le Baron will not abandon me. There is no man more honourable, more generous. I have only to let him, and he would do too much."

"Then why are you so troubled? You are an orphan, you are of age, nobody has any hold on you. A child, under those circumstances, is not a catastrophe."

Rosalie opened her lips again and again without finding the words she sought. She nibbled a morsel of buttered cake. Mag held her tongue. Embarrassed by this silence, the young girl ended by saying more humbly even than when she had made her first confession—

"It is because of Madame la Baïonne."

"The Baroness need know nothing about it," said Mag. "Leave your situation for some plausible reason and settle down in Paris. The Baron comes often enough . . ."

But Rosalie shook her head.

"He will never consent to that."

"I don't understand."

"He says to me: 'You came into my house, a good and pure young girl, and I am not going to make you a kept woman.' And then, in his view, it is the worst of all to live at the same time with his wife and—another. Since this has happened to us, he tells Madame la Baronne that he is ill." *

This time the German could not help laughing.

"Oh," she said, "if the Baroness contents herself with reasons like that . . ."

But Rosalie protested against Mag's irony—

"Madame is not blind, oh no, she is not at all the kind of woman that one can make believe anything. Only she has an absolute confidence in her husband and in me, and it is just that" (once more tears moistened the eyes, and sobs shook the voice of the young girl), "it is just that which is so terrible. If Madame gets to know, it will be a horrible grief to her, and it is we, it is Monsieur and I, who will have brought it on her, we who love her so much that we would give our lives for her."

The tempest of anguish began again, this time without it being possible for Mag to stop it. Rosalie wallowed in her grief, saying almost in a loud voice: "We love her so much. . . . She is a regular saint. . . . One can't help loving her. . . . Dear, good Madame, who has done nothing but good to me. I am a wretch." *

"Be quiet, I implore you," said Mag. "People are coming."

A hesitating, timid couple—one of those unassuming intrigues that one occasionally observes in

Paris, the man and the woman well matched in their mutual poverty of physique—had just seated themselves at one of the empty tables and were deliberating as to what beverage they should order. Rosalie tried to control herself, and if she did not altogether succeed, at all events, she stopped making a noise.

"With all this," Mag said to her, "you have not told me what your master intends to do."

Rosalie repeated—

"M. le Baron will never abandon me."

"Well, that is the main thing," said Mag, feeling that it was useless to insist, and that she was touching on the actual secret of the two lovers, which the young girl would not betray. "Besides, you are not yet sure of anything. How long ago did you say that it was?"

"The evening of Henriette's sixteenth birthday, you remember? . . . the party at Val d'Anay. . . . M. le Baron brought me back right to my room."

"The party at Val d'Anay? That is only a little more than two months ago. Don't despair. Perhaps it is only a false alarm. You haven't consulted anybody?"

"I know no one in whom I could confide, and Monsieur knows no one either. However, Monsieur and I would have to be quite certain."

Mag understood the allusion to mysterious plans that Rosalie did not wish to confide.

"If it would render you a service, I will give you the address of a reliable and discreet person."

"I should never dare to go there alone."

"Oh, well, I'll take you there."

Rosalie was so pleased that she seized Mag's hand and kissed it.

"Oh, thank you. When will you do that?"

"As soon as you come to Paris again."

"I am coming back on Saturday by the two o'clock train, to go the round of the ones that are in arrears."

"Agreed for Saturday. I'll meet you at the train. But ssh—Sandra."

The beautiful Italian entered the narrow room so triumphantly beautiful that the loving couple, having seen her enter, seemed to become conscious of their own ugliness and buried themselves in mournful silence, all their modest illusion destroyed. Rosalie and Mag made her sit down between them. She apologised for being late; she had scarcely dared to hope to find her two friends. No, she would not have tea; she had been obliged to take tea at Rumpelmayer's with Madame Corbellier, Loute . . ."

"And Jacques," finished Mag.

"And Jacques," repeated Sandra, with a smile.

"Here is the only happy one of us all," said the German rather bitterly. "Rosalie has in her heart a love that is returned but threatened by circumstances. As for me, I have a delightful lover—only he is a waster. Sandra alone has won the big prize at the first shot—a friend, young, rich, good-looking, an artist and a man who means marriage!"

"Really," said Rosalie, without concealing her surprise. "Monsieur Jacques Corbellier is going to marry you?"

The Italian made a movement of extreme hauteur.

"Between Monsieur Jacques and me there has never been any question of marriage. But that would not be such an extraordinary event. M. Corbellier is rich, but I am of a noble house in my own country."

"Oh, of course," said Rosalie crestfallen, "it would be perfectly natural."

"And then," concluded Mag (who having lived in Italy knew how few Italians admit that they are not members of "a very noble and ancient family"), "and then, when one has a face like that, one can marry a prince, and it is a prince, too, who is the lucky one. Tell us about your love affair, Sandra, it will cheer us up a bit."

Restored to her serenity, the Italian smiled—

"Frankly, we are merely two good comrades, he and I. We have music together and talk Italian. I told him that his young friends with their airs of fast women and their way of talking upside down disgusted me, and since then he has scarcely seen them any more, even his favourite, the little d'Amblin, the one who dyes his hair. And would you believe that he used to rouge his lips? And he would spend the afternoons on a couch like a woman. I plagued him so that now the boxing-master comes every morning to make him work. For the rest, what they say about him is all vile calumnies. He is a man like any other, and he finds pleasure with women like the rest. He has now set his heart in spending a whole day with me out of Paris."

"Bravo! Sandra," cried Mag. "But you know . . . don't open his eyes too much. A whole day, alone together . . . it's dangerous, that!"

The three governesses continued to chat amicably up to the moment when the lighting up of the Arcade reminded them that it was getting late. Rosalie was leaving at seven for Val d'Anay. As she rose Sandra handed her three hundred francs, representing the tickets placed by the Corbelliers; it was immediately

engulfed in the money-bag. Mag, having settled the modest bill, the trio made their way to the Rue des Petits-Champs by the Arcade. There they separated. Sandra took the Metropolitan. Mag offered to drive Rosalie to the St. Lazare station in a taxi.

During the drive, which was prolonged by obstructions in the boulevards and the Rue Auber, they began to talk again of what interested Rosalie, who, calmer now, welcomed the hope of being reassured on the following Saturday.

"If we are mistaken! If all this was only an evil dream!"

Mag looked her in the eyes—

"But if it is not an evil dream, if it is a reality? You will make no effort to rid yourself of it?"

"Oh, never," exclaimed the little one passionately. "Even if Monsieur had wished it, I believe that I should have resisted. But in any case, he, too, thinks as I do."

"Don't put yourself out, my child," said Mag.

She accompanied Rosalie to the waiting-room. She seemed to hesitate about leaving her. At last, she invited her to sit down in a distant corner of the room—

"Listen to me, little one," she said. "When I was waiting for you this afternoon in the Choiseul Arcade, I could not foresee what you have told me, nor consequently that I should be in the way of helping you in something. And it is I who wanted to ask a favour of you."

"Oh, I am glad, my dear Mag, if I can . . ."

"You can. Don't interrupt me before I have finished explaining to you. Here is a little jewel" (she unclasped from her corsage a pin with three

pearls, not very big ones, but quite round and pure), "I am fond of it. It is a remembrance from Bolski, the first that he ever gave me. Take it—I tell you to take it—and shut it up in your money-bag. Here it is. Don't lose it: the first jeweller you go to will give you eighteen hundred francs for it at least. Now you are going to lend me fifteen hundred francs until Saturday; that is of no consequence to you, since you are returning on Saturday to finish your collection. You can tell them at Val d'Anay that you have collected fifteen hundred francs less than you actually have. If I am not in a position to repay you, very well, we shall go together and sell the jewel. Why do you look so dumbfounded?"

"It is because—I don't understand."

"All the same, it isn't complicated. Bolski has lost at cards a large sum for him, not in a gambling-den, but in a regular club. He must pay to-night, and he is fifteen hundred francs short. There would be one easy way to get it: the Under-Secretary is prowling round my skirts, but that disgusts me. Between now and Saturday, Bolski or I will have time to look for the money. Perhaps his luck will have changed and then I shall not be forced to sell my poor jewel. It is agreed, isn't it? you risk nothing."

Rosalie pondered for a second.

"Can I tell Monsieur about it?"

"Must you?"

"No, Monsieur never asks me for the accounts. It is I who keep the accounts of the work. But I should not like to hide anything from him."

"Then tell him."

They were calling out to the passengers now. Rosalie handed Mag the fifteen hundred francs and

they kissed each other. Mag whispered in Rosalie's ear these words which made her groan, and which, all through the journey, were to keep her awake in spite of her fatigue—

“Understand, if between now and Saturday, Bolski and I have taken strychnine together, or if we have cleared out, sell the jewel and keep the balance in memory of me.”

CHAPTER IV

MOULINS DE CHELLES

"You understand quite well, Monsieur Jacques—rather feeble; come now, put more force into it, more force!—all those Swedish exercises—that's better, but I felt nothing so far—lying on the ground, expanding the chest—one, two; come now—touching the shoes with fingers—and is that the way you parry? What are you thinking about?—all that's sport for fat women, for *vieux marcheurs*. . . . That is not the true movement of strength and agility—ah, bravo! This time I felt it get through. Rest yourself. What we are doing now is more like it. The whole body is working—arms, limbs, thorax, and the brain too. . . . Shall I tell you the truth? In the two weeks we've been boxing together you have become another man. . . . Thanks, I prefer Caporals, with your permission. . . . Between ourselves (I have no wish to offend you), but you had the appearance of a little woman. And that was a pity, with physical resources like these. . . . Well, Monsieur Jacques, until the day after to-morrow. I am leaving you now, as I don't wish to keep you from your shower-bath."

Chubby, tanned, with frizzled red hair, round back, enormous limbs—the famous Professor Pironneau pressed the delicate, ungloved hand of his pupil and went away. In spite of the open window, the room where Jacques had taken his boxing lesson,

which adjoined his dressing-room, was full of a penetrating odour of perspiration that offended his nostrils. Jacques went quickly to his dressing-room. His valet was waiting for him beside the bath; he undressed his master, who, after throwing away his half-smoked cigarette, got into the bath.

"Go, George. . . . I'll ring. Ah! Get ready my grey suit with the little stripes, a soft shirt with mauve cuffs. . . . I shall leave the house about half-past ten, and I shall be lunching out. Did you buy the railway time-table of the Est—the last issue?"

"Yes, I have it in the hall."

"Bring it to me when I ring."

Alone, stretched out in the warm water, young Corbellier looked complacently at the black and blue marks with which M. Pironneau's fists had been covering his chest and arms for the last fortnight. While enjoying, as usual, this lassitude in the water, where women dawdle so willingly, he experienced, on this radiant morning, so fresh after the recent storms, a growing desire to breathe in the air in big bumpers, to run, to exercise his muscles in the open air. And this double tendency of his nature, at the present hour, showed itself also in the luxury of the things around him. The scene of this luxury differed little from a woman's dressing-room: the couch was stuffed with cushions; on a round table there were a thousand minute implements for polishing, depilating and frosting the skin. There were phials and receptacles without number, and a profusion of exceedingly fine and very much embroidered linen. There was also, very conspicuous, on the panel under the best light a portrait of Jacques Corbellier himself at the age of seventeen, in his dressing-gown, with the

ambiguous face of an effeminate youth. But the intrusion of new habits jostled here and there with this wished-for and carefully sought femininity. Beside a pair of blue slippers lay a pair of 22-pound dumbbells. A sporting journal lay open on the cushions of the couch, with a reproduction on its first page of a great boxing contest that had been given the evening before; Jacques had recently never missed one of these. And in protest against the picture of the ambiguous youth, who formerly had reduced all this luxury to his own pattern, a huge photograph, not even framed, was nailed to the wall, just above the pastel, with all the negligence of a workroom. In this could be seen, facing the monstrous chimpanzee of a Pironneau, Jacques Corbellier in boxing get-up administering a "swing" to his opponent.

A taste for celebrity and for the attentions of society, for decadent literature, paradoxical conversations, physical culture (he knew himself to be very good-looking), delight in dress, even in gew-gaws—there, in sum, was the limit of Jacques' effeminacy at the time when Sandra Ceroni appeared in the Corbelliers' house. His friends, his worst friends, knew it, and in their classical affectation gave him the sobriquet that the youthful Virgil is said to have been given: *Parthenia*.

At their first meeting—it was at the luncheon-table—Jacques admired the Italian; he was a great deal too much an artist not to appreciate the charm of such a face, and the chatter of women pleased him, as it did the majority of his contemporaries of the same type as himself. But when Sandra began to give him Italian lessons and play the piano with him, he felt

himself less at ease. The usual common ground between women and himself was lacking in this case. One could not talk gew-gaws with Sandra, who was proud of her beauty, but indifferent to its adornment. And the arabesques of conversation, the *concetti* which so enchanted the fair ladies of literary salons, left the Italian's perfect face impassive*or rendered it severe. For the first time in his life Jacques found himself *tête-à-tête* with a partner who desired to be neither witty, nor fashionable, nor brilliantly dressed, nor even amiable. She was resolutely a woman, nothing but a woman, accustomed to the admiration and the desire of men as to a natural tribute. There was no effort on her side to please Jacques. She taught him strictly what she had to teach him, treating this pupil who was almost of age exactly as she did the twelve-year-old Louie. When the daily lessons, the meals in common, had, in spite of their lack of reciprocal attraction, placed a certain familiarity between them, Jacques' puerile vanity was touched. He sought, if not to seduce, at least to astonish; and as the governess strictly kept her own place and expressed no opinion, he implored her, he questioned her, he wished to make her say what she thought of him. She answered without any embarrassment that he seemed to her to have an agreeable voice and a gift for music. He became unnerved, wished for more. What did she think of him physically, morally? She refused to answer for a little, but finally told him of her detestation of effeminacy and artificiality; she sang the praises of simplicity and energy, but at the same time she let him understand that she found her pupil very good-looking, and this judgment pleased him so much that he forgave her criticism.

After that their relations became modified. They had found a field for discussion; their two natures, so violently different, opposed each other passionately. But in the very act of opposition they became attracted to each other. Jacques' influence on Sandra was confined to making her more Parisian in her attire, in mentioning to her lapses of taste in her toilette, in revealing to her modern literary culture, of which she was ignorant. On the other hand, through vanity, through an imperious wish to please, Jacques became simpler and more manly, at first believing that he was playing a part, and then gradually, as Amyot says, deceiving himself in the game, and discovering in his own nature an aptitude for a new way of living. There was no unexpected and complete change in him; the effeminate youth was not transformed suddenly into an athlete. Jacques in society remained the Jacques of little mannerisms and conceits; with his friends he indulged in paradoxes and preciosities as before. But half of his life became disciplined by the morals and ideas of a normal youth—his life in his own home. And this life at home attracted him more and more because Sandra shared it. He suspected her of being in love with him, she to whom all men seemed indifferent; pride at this choice would have been enough to make him enjoy the Italian's society. Music was also a ceaseless cause for bringing the two together. Thus, with his nature, so curiously dual, Jacques felt the whole of one side carrying him towards what Sandra liked and towards Sandra herself, while other influences and other attractions grew weaker. Sandra was not boasting when she said to Rosalie: "I have made him break with his equivocal friends." And it was

she, too, who had decided him on dumb-bells and boxing. He had given himself up to them without displeasure, admiring his own skill, and already in love with the physical energy which he had discovered in himself. He discovered there something else as well, something that he did not wish to confess to himself: a mysterious wish to know if Sandra loved him enough to belong to him. He did not desire that supreme surrender, he would have been afraid of it; but he would have liked to believe it possible. Between them there had been no word resembling love, no physical familiarity; he did not even kiss her hand any more, as he used to do in the early days. But already they did not conceal from each other that need of each other's presence which is the most undeniable sign of love. Sandra, in her haughtiness, did not allow him to see this; more impatient and less master of himself, Jacques confessed it. And it was quite true, too, that he had asked her again and again—as Sandra told Rosalie and Mag—to spend a day with him alone, one of those free days that Madame Corbellier allowed her daughter's governess once a fortnight. For a long time she had refused, for fear of disappointment rather than from fear of too bold an enterprise. But she herself was won over by the desire to be alone together. She loved Jacques; she loved him for his beauty and his intelligence, but also for everything that she had recreated in him. Simple as she was, she saw no impossibility in his marrying her; was she not beautiful, well educated, and free? One of the reasons which determined her to consent to this afternoon alone with him was precisely because it might seem to him opportune for settling this cardinal point: what were Jacques' inten-

tions towards her? Now that she was making a man of him again, he must behave like a man and declare his intentions.

The date, then, of this sentimental prank had been arranged more than a fortnight in advance by the governess and the son of the house. It was their first secret, and they immediately experienced what a uniting force a secret possesses. They sought opportunities for being alone together so as to discuss their project. Where should they go? Sandra wanted "*campagna da vero e vicino all' acqua*"—"the real country with a river." Jacques remembered a lock of the Marne at Moulins de Chelles where there was shade, a beautiful stretch of river, a convenient restaurant, and solitude enough. Unfortunately, a Senegal heat had been crushing Paris for some time past; even the southern Sandra herself was afraid of it. Then there was—starting from the evening of Rosalie's visit—a week of storms and tempests, hail and rain mixed. At last, Paris woke up one day in the calm light of a warm, limpid spring. Jacques and Sandra had a new preoccupation, about which they consulted each other with glances and half-words; would this weather last until their adventure? It did last; and on the morning on which Jacques, stretched out in his bath after his boxing lesson, took from his valet the latest guide-book issued by the Est railway, and verified the time selected for meeting Sandra in front of the station bookstall, a delicately blue-tinted sky, without a single cloud, announced a superb afternoon.

"Here it is, George," said Jacques, returning the thin volume to the valet, who was waiting. "Give me my dressing-gown."

While he was drying his master and rubbing him with a horsehair glove, the valet said—

"Madame asks Monsieur to let her know when he will be ready. Madame will take tea with Monsieur, if that will not disturb him. She has important things to tell Monsieur."

"Good! In ten minutes."

Often mother and son would invite each other to morning tea. Their apartments adjoined, but those of Jacques, which looked east, were pleasanter in the morning; and when she did not get up too late, Emmeline would go there by preference. The increasing intimacy between Sandra and Jacques had by no means weakened that which had always united mother and son. Emmeline was even secretly grateful to the Italian for making Jacques' appearance more manly, and for having got rid of d'Amblin and his set. For, frivolous and indifferent as she was, certain allusions in society had occasionally perturbed her. As for being anxious about the possible results of a liaison between her son and her daughter's governess, that was altogether beyond her simple and lazy optimism.

It was nearly ten o'clock when mother and son sat down before their tea and toast.

"I have a heap of things to tell you," Emmeline said to Jacques, as she kissed him; "extraordinary things."

This announcement in no way startled the young man, did not even excite his curiosity. He knew that, for his mother, the latest tittle-tattle that she had heard was always something extraordinary. But he was willing enough to listen to her chatter, as he liked having her with him; taking an interest in the indoor dress that she was wearing, in the state of her hair,

going into raptures over her arms, which were still splendid, and over her ankle, which was just visible. On her side, she pulled herself up in the middle of a sentence to exclaim, as she looked at him—

“My goodness, Jacques, how good-looking you are ! It isn’t permissible to be so handsome as that when one is a man.”

On this morning, while buttering round after round of toast (she was beginning to break loose from all regulations of diet, and was getting much fatter), she related—

“Would you believe it, while I was still in bed—they had just opened my windows—Croze rang me up on the telephone.” (Mother and son spoke of Croze among themselves without the slightest embarrassment as a valued friend of the house.) “What he had to tell me, he said, was so unexpected and so interesting that he had been on the point of telephoning yesterday after midnight on leaving Haumont-Segré, Berthe’s father. Yes, Haumont-Segré had asked him to make an appointment with him for yesterday, and Croze, who was so burdened with work all day—you know he is organizing the mobilization of aeroplanes—was only able to receive him in the Avenue Velasquez at ten o’clock in the evening.”

“What did he want? To fix up the marriage between Guy and Berthe?”

“Not at all. . . . Something else serious in another way.”

She stopped an instant to prepare her effect, then in a tone of confidence she let out—

“The Haumont-Segrés are on the verge of bankruptcy.”

Jacques was surprised.

"Is it possible? I believed them to be so rich."

"They still have a fine fortune, but the Bank is at the end of its tether, and all that is left them is scarcely enough to stop the leaks. There was no speculating, only bad management and ten years of progressive losses; and the most serious point" (Emmeline lowered her voice still more) "is that Haumont, it appears, has borrowed on title-deeds deposited by his clients. And if he does not pay the amount, it will be the Court of Assizes for him."

"What can Croze do for him?"

"Haumont would like to have the support of the Government and the indulgence of the law during his liquidation. He has still hopes of paying everything in full. Very little prevents him from doing so. Berthe, who is of age, and whose personal fortune is over a million francs, would only have to give her signature. Her parents have not yet dared to ask her for it, as they are afraid of her refusing."

"Poor people," said Jacques without emotion. "What a bore it must be to run after thousand-franc bills up till ten o'clock at night! Will Croze do anything for them?"

"A month ago Croze was offended at that minx of a Berthe falling out with Guy. But you may imagine that now he blesses Providence for it! And as he is an excellent man, he will try to make a decent exit easy for them. Urged him strongly to do this. But whether they avoid the Court of Assizes or not, it is ruin for them. Old Haumont and his wife will have only two hundred thousand francs to live on."

Relieved of this important piece of news, Emmeline

directed her chatter to other topics : the Horse Show, the Revue at the Ambassadors', a linen dress that she was going to try on that afternoon. "Could you come with me to give your opinion of it? . . . It's Lopicque's, in the Rue Royale."

"No," replied Jacques, with a blush. "I'm lunching in the country with d'Amblin."

Emmeline's maternal instinct instantly detected the lie. She knew that d'Amblin and Jacques scarcely saw each other at all, and thought to herself : "It's Sandra's holiday ; they are going to meet each other." She was troubled at the thought, without knowing if it were through pride or through jealousy.

The afternoon of this very day, this afternoon planned so long in advance and waited for with equal impatience by Sandra and Jacques, was only saved from ending for both of them in the nightmare in which it had commenced by an accident of a quite vulgar nature. For, absolutely alone with the Italian, away from that protection of his home which is such a comfort to a nervous type like his, Jacques suddenly became his former self again : finicky, affected, feminine, ironical, displaying for Sandra's benefit the sophisticated graces that so enchanted the smart ladies in literary salons. Sandra was so upset by them that she felt herself almost struck dumb. She was much too simple and straightforward to realize that he was stirred to the very depths by this thought : "The people who see us together will think that she is my mistress," and that he was trying to drown his timidity beneath a flow of words. On his side, he saw quite well that he was enraging his companion, but he was afraid of silence, and, cost what it

might with anecdotes, with floods of turgid rhetoric, with professions of admiration (so cold, that several times Sandra had tears in her eyes), he filled in desperately the minutes. •

In this manner the stages of their amorous adventure from which they had promised themselves so much gaiety and happiness followed one another; the little journey by railway over a sunlit country, the getting out at the deserted station, the walk side by side along the windings of a country road, the arrival at the chosen place, the meal beside the water. A mocking Providence seemed to find pleasure in the fact that Nature's most smiling welcome attended their unhappiness: the weather was ideal, the place even more delightful than Jacques remembered it to have been; a simple but dainty lunch was coquettishly served to them right beside that flowing water which Sandra had wished for; they were alone in a large harbour until almost the end of their meal. However, just when the servant brought them cherries, strawberries and cream, the table next theirs was taken by three newcomers—two men of about thirty, and a young woman to whom both showed equal familiarity. They were employees, of some large shop, on a spree, as their loud conversation very soon showed. Their proximity put a definite stop to the artificial liveliness which up till now Jacques had managed to keep up, in spite of Sandra's mournful silence. He became silent, and a nervous hostility began to thrill between them, so intense that they could no longer conceal it. The Italian's beautiful face contracted under the effort to keep from bursting into tears. Jacques brushed with his right hand the crumbs from the tablecloth, nibbled the stem of a cherry, moistened his lips, with-

out drinking, ten times running in the champagne glass.

They would have left the table and separated at once, if they had not felt themselves being watched by the neighbouring trio.

From the moment of their arrival these people had viewed with animosity the regal splendour of Sandra and the refined elegance of Jacques. One of the men had proposed a table further away, but the other man and the woman had insisted on the nearer table, the only one which was also within a few steps of the water. Jacques and Sandra had heard phrases in strained voices: "The river belongs to everybody"; "Nobody is going to put a spot on his beautiful grey lounge jacket! Surely!" As soon as they were seated and served, they fell on the food and drink with the appetites of people who have spent the morning in walking in the sun. Gradually warmed up, they raised their voices and hazarded remarks on the silence of their two neighbours, on the sadness of Sandra. One of the men, a fat shopman with a short beard on his chin, the wag of the trio, who strutted in a brown jacket and a pair of bluish trousers, and whose lightest words were greeted by exaggerated laughs from the other two, became jocose, reassured by the fact that Jacques and Sandra affected not to hear what was being said—

"I see that she is being bored, poor girl, with a fellow like that opposite to her! My grey suit and my curled hair, my dear!"

"Be quiet, Bernard," said the other man. But the woman encouraged him, bursting with laughter.

He continued as if he were addressing Sandra, but always without looking at her.

"Let him go! See, there's a place at our table, and we are two to one here. Come now, make up your mind, dark madonna!"

Motionless for a moment, Jacques suddenly threw down his napkin, rose to his feet and advanced towards the wag.

"You," said he, "you are going to be silent!"

The man gave a start of surprise, but the delicate appearance of his opponent reassured him.

Standing up in his turn, he kept his head.

"Be silent? You haven't had a look at me yet, you wretched little youngster!"

Immediately he received full on the jaw a "straight left" in accordance with the best technique of Pironneau, and rolled on the floor right up to the legs of his two companions, who, thoroughly scared, picked him up. Jacques remained on guard. A delightful sense of relief had come to his nerves at the very moment when he had felt the man's face flatten out and give way under his fist; he would now have defied ten adversaries. But he of the beard, now on his feet again, contented himself with grumbling out, "If one can't even joke a little," and again, "One isn't brutal to such a point as that"; while his two companions, male and female, showered upon this most pacific person counsels of moderation—

"That's right, keep your temper. One doesn't fight with people like that." Finally, as Jacques went back to his table, the wag's nose began to bleed violently. The trio took advantage of the incident to leave the place and make their way to the hotel. Jacques and Sandra remained in possession of the harbour.

Then they dared to look at each other, and all at once their youth regained its serenity and bubbled

into inextinguishable laughter, the laughter of adolescent gods, the laughter that has nothing trivial in it and does not mar the noble grace of the countenance. By his act of manly violence, performed without a shadow of reflection, Jacques felt as though he were exorcised, and Sandra—who detested everything that remained in him of femininity—had recognized *her* Jacques in this vigorous boxer, whom she had divined underneath false appearances, divined and recreated. They began to talk amicably together as at home. They made fun of the routed trio; they made fun of themselves, and of the ridiculous embarrassment that had paralysed them since their meeting at the station. Jacques excused himself for it.

“It seemed to me such an extraordinary thing to be beside you, completely alone.”

Sandra protested—

“You weren’t your real self with me; I don’t know where your thoughts had strayed to, but surely they were far from me. Oh, I hated you!”

With their simplicity and good spirits, their appetites too returned. They had scarcely touched the meal, but now they began to devour cherries, strawberries, cream and bread, and ordered more champagne. They had drawn their chairs closer together, and for the first time since they had known each other Jacques had stroked with his delicate hands the strong and perfectly moulded ones of Sandra. But at these still timid strokings he felt himself penetrated by a wave of emotion so powerful that almost immediately he turned away. She, with the unerring instinct of a woman in love, was careful not to provoke him; she did not even assist his attempts. But she did not draw back; she refused nothing; she was for him

the open Paradise that nothing could close against him.

Overwhelmed by an agony of joy, they left the table. A bench under the shade of some plane-trees, quite close to the water, tempted them. "*L'acqua corrente*," Sandra murmured, smiling. And quite close to the ear of Jacques, who trembled at his proximity to her, she continued to speak in Italian, which already he understood perfectly. She told him about her childhood. . . . "*Vicino alla nostra casa, c'era una riviera cosi, la Sciarra, si chiama. . . .*" She told him that she was of a good family from Borghi near Trieste, of a family that had formerly intermarried with the nobility, but that now, so far as money was concerned, had fallen into decay. Her father had been compelled to accept an insignificant post in the Borghi *octroi*. She had been intended for the post office, but as her masters found her intelligent and hard-working, they had induced her to finish her studies, and then her father had been struck down by hemiplegia; his modest pension just sufficed to find food for the old people—the father who was helpless and the mother who took care of him. They had proposed to Sandra that she should enter at the age of seventeen an influential Austrian family as governess; since then she had wandered about the world, having only been, however, in three situations up to the time of her arrival at the Corbelliers. She was twenty-two years old.

She told him this in her moving contralto voice, sweetly, with the charming phrases of her language, with those flowery images which are strewn naturally over Italian conversation, with the beautiful, sonorous superlatives which would have seemed redundant in

French, but which in Italian seemed quite in place : "*Nobilissimo, tanto voluttuoso che non si può immaginare, più grande di un palazzo. . .*" Was it all true what she told him ? Jacques was quite incapable of asking himself that. What troubled him was not the mystery of this foreigner, born too far from him, and whose life was too filled with wanderings for him ever, ever to be able to know it. What troubled him was hearing a woman's voice vibrate for him, quite close, and this woman speak to him of herself, initiating him into her past life as a child and a young girl, and, as it were, undressing her soul before him. She told him the story of the American who had wished to violate her, and Jacques experienced a rage like that which had just made him drive his fist into the shopman's bearded jaw. He was emboldened enough to press his lips against Sandra's hair, and, after almost swooning for a moment, he breathed in its aroma, astonished at tasting the sensation of voluptuousness. •

"It's hot," cried Sandra all of a sudden. "What do you say to returning to the house ? They will find a pleasant corner for us where we can rest. *Mi farebbe piacere di dormire, un momentino.*"

They returned to the main building, and at the door the proprietor, doubtless accustomed to the visits of more experienced couples, said to them of his own accord, familiarly—

"It's this great heat that brings you in. Perhaps the ladies and gentlemen would like to rest for a little ? Augustin, show these ladies and gentlemen into the comfortable little sitting-room on the first floor. Shall I send you up some refreshments ? We have some good white port, with Savoy biscuits."

Jacques and Sandra, both of them a little red, acquiesced and followed Augustin, who ushered them into a sitting-room perfectly respectable and decent, like all the rest of the house. The stiff imitation Louis XVI furniture made no pretence to merit the epithet "comfortable," but opposite the window curtains concealed what was probably an alcove. Jacques and Sandra did not leave the window until the waiter had brought the port and biscuits and had withdrawn, after being assured that "these ladies and gentlemen had need of nothing more." The window looked out on a little empty area, ornamented with a horizontal beam sustained on posts to which were attached rings and a trapeze. Beyond rose the steep bank of the Marne, and after that the slope to the scattered woods, to which the excessive brightness of the sun gave the appearance of being half bald.

All that was left of femininity in Jacques' nature was now concentrated in a mingling of uneasiness and desire, similar to that of a wife when the door has been closed on her with her newly married husband. Sandra understood the danger of empty minutes, and that if they were prolonged the uneasiness of the morning might once more invade this undecided mind. All the same, she would not have dared to make an advance, if she had been capable of reflection at this moment. But her own temperament had nothing indecisive in it, and it came to her aid now. Her eyes became intoxicated as she looked at Jacques, absolutely beautiful at this juncture, when no affectation and no lackadaisical mannerism spoilt him; and this living statue of Antinous inflamed her passion. She closed the window abruptly, clasped the young man in her arms as she murmured the

words that were necessary, those words that she did not seek, but which none the less roused love in his heart. In her native tongue and in a broken voice she told him that he was beautiful; spoke to him with her eyes, with her forehead, with her hair, with her neck, with her mouth. And it was these woman's words, explaining him minutely to himself, that aroused passion in this strange youth. Through his love of this woman he loved himself; and in the first kiss which united their lips it was of his own lips that he thought. But through these ambiguous caprices, Nature's inflexible force, *divum hominumque voluptas*, led them inevitably to her own ends. Sandra made no struggle. Only, quite as strong as her young lover, she stopped him at the entrance to the alcove, clasping his delicate wrists with her fingers, firm as steel.

"I trust you," she said. "But tell me that I shall be your wife!"

He swore it to her, mad with happiness at feeling the flow of virile passion submerging triumphantly all the indecisions and all the puerilities of the past.

Then, as she kissed him again and again, she said—

"I love you too much ever to do you harm, even if you betrayed me. But they who would wish to keep you from me, let them take care!"

The shadows had lengthened on the opposite slope and were shading the empty places among the thin woods; the lock of the Marne no longer glittered under a flood of light, but seemed like a thread of dull white metal curving among the willows, when

Jacques returned alone, from the alcove, to lean out of the window. He had slept for more than an hour, an overwhelming sleep. He glanced with eyes that saw nothing at the court with its horizontal beam, at the river, at the horizon. He was at once proud and distressed. He experienced both relief and a little sadness; he hoped that Sandra would not join him too quickly; he dreaded hearing himself being called.

BOOK III

MAG

CHAPTER I

THE EMANCIPATED ONE

THAT same night, towards mid-June, when the pallor of morning twilight filtered through the openings of the curtains, Haumont-Segré and his wife were still continuing—in her bedroom—a terrible *tête-à-tête*, a conversation that resembled the jerky flight of an imprisoned fly, now buzzing, now suddenly interrupted, as though annihilated. Twenty times they had asked each other, "What are we to do?" Uselessly they had repeated the dates, the dates of the dreaded time-limits that they each knew so well. Twenty times, one after the other, they had uttered those retrospective hypotheses, the human revolt against the tyranny of the past, the tyranny of the accomplished fact: "If you had accepted a point less in the Venezuelan Loan. . . . If Boutzoff had not withdrawn his two million deposit. . . . When I think that that war might have broken out six months later!" They had also exchanged recriminations, she with her: "You are a bungler. . . . My father left you a magnificent position. . . . It isn't So-and-so" (a rival) "who would have been wound up like this!" and he, with his: "Have you ever been of any help to me? With your imaginary ailments, I have always been afraid of bringing on an attack if I consulted you. You do not know even how to keep the household accounts; all your people rob you; we have lost

hundreds of thousands of francs through your negligence." Then they had thrown themselves into each other's arms, begging each other's forgiveness; and as their haggard faces touched each other, they had each in a very low tone at the same moment suggested the solution which seems to them desperate not only peace and deliverance, but a revenge on destiny, a supreme way of defying it, of mocking it, by snatching from it its prey.

It was Madame Haumont-Segré who kindled a spark from these terrible ashes. Like so many neurasthenics, she showed a superhuman energy from the moment that her husband confessed to her his coming bankruptcy. She made no more complaints of any physical ailment, and yet, if Haumont-Segré had had time to observe her, he would have detected in her signs, this time indisputable, of a mortal exhaustion.

Seated at the end of that couch, on which she had not lain down for the last forty-eight hours, she said—

"Agreed, we shall disappear, both of us. Believe me, I shall be no less brave than you before a cachet or an injection. But before that let us try our last cards. You say that we could get out of the business with six hundred thousand francs?"

"Even five hundred thousand would be enough, as my brother offers me all his available funds, a hundred thousand francs. Besides, the Ropart d'Anays, whom we shall see to-morrow, will perhaps see their way to an advance . . ."

"Well, these five hundred thousand francs, minus what the Ropart d'Anays will, perhaps, advance, Berthe must give to us. She must even place at your disposal the eleven hundred thousands francs in

her possession, so that you may be able to pass the crisis and launch that loan of twenty-five millions for the Port of Salonica, which will save you."

The banker shook his grey head.

"Berthe will give nothing at all."

"She will give, if she is made to understand that it is in her interest to give."

"It is certainly her interest not to allow her father to become a bankrupt and possibly to go to prison. But it is not the interest of Mademoiselle Smith."

"Why not?"

"The interest of Mademoiselle Smith is for Berthe to remain rich, so that she, the Englishwoman, may be able to live at her expense. Ah, the d——d Englishwoman! All the troubles of our house commenced the day that she entered it; one could swear that she has the evil eye, and that she cast a spell over us. She robbed us of Berthe. I shall perhaps be compelled to kill myself, but I should not like to die without having strangled the Englishwoman first." And he pressed his powerful fingers round an imaginary neck.

"No, Maxime," replied his wife, "she must not be strangled yet. One must make use of her."

"By buying her?"

Madame Haumont-Segré made a sign of assent; the banker became thoughtful.

Assuredly Fanny Smith was impenetrable; she had masked her game so well that one could not reproach her with any malpractice, nor even with any indication of monopolizing. But Haumont-Segré had had too much to do with money in the course of his life, had too often seen the weakening of high-principled people before a pile of bank-notes, to reject the idea suggested

by his wife. The conversation between the married couple became animated again with the feverish play of conjectures. To purchase Fanny's influence over her pupil, that was a new solution, that was a hope that had not yet proved futile. They clung to it. Comforted a little, they had the courage to undress, to go to bed, to brave darkness and insomnia. They lay down one beside the other, as in the first years of their marriage. The common danger had soldered their union together again. Their fevered hands clasped each other; they managed in this way to sleep nearly three hours between four and seven, a broken sleep tormented by nightmares. Awakened by the first sounds throughout the house, their terrible conversation began again: how to approach Fanny Smith? How to propose, face to face with her, to buy her?

"It is you, Julie, who are in a better position to speak to her. I hardly ever say a word to her; besides, an overture like that is not so serious coming from a woman . . ."

"No, no, it is for you to do it. It is your business as head of the family. What authority have I to offer money? She wouldn't even take me seriously!"

They finally agreed on this plan: Haumont-Segré would summon the Englishwoman into his study and would begin the conversation alone with her, while his wife waited in the next room, ready to come to the rescue if the united action of the household should become necessary. It happened to be a Wednesday, a day favourable for seeing Fanny without her pupil's knowledge, for every Wednesday morning Berthe went to a painting class from the life; her maid

accompanied her, and she did not return until after midday. As the Haumont-Segrés were going this same day to take the half-past eleven train for Val d'Anay, Berthe's exit was watched, and immediately after she had gone Mademoiselle Smith was asked to come down to the banker's study. It was then a quarter to ten o'clock. She delayed scarcely five minutes. When she entered the sumptuous room, with its red hangings and its beautiful Empire furniture, in which the banker awaited her, she was dressed, as usual, in black, and the excitement that this unaccustomed summons must have caused could only be divined by a slight increase of stiffness in her bearing, and by a more visible effort to control her features.

"You have asked for me to come, Monsieur?"

Was this a real inability to assimilate the French idiom, or was it simply disdain, thoroughly English, for every language except her own? Or was it a display made as a precaution against the surprises of conversation? Fanny Smith, after ten years in Paris, stumbled into an Anglicism in every sentence.

"Yes, Mademoiselle," replied Haumont-Segré, "I must have a serious talk with you. Sit down, I beg of you. I am coming to the facts without preamble. We may have been sometimes, my wife and I, in disagreement with you about Berthe's education, but we are none the less convinced both of your personal qualities and of the interest . . . the interest . . . very sincere, that you take in your pupil."

He stopped, expecting a word of thanks, or at least of assent; the Englishwoman on her chair maintained the immobility of Madame Tussaud's waxworks.

"Yes," continued Haumont, without losing countenance, "you are intelligent and devoted to Berthe. That cannot be disputed. One can then be certain of finding you ready to exert yourself in Berthe's interests; isn't that so?"

The Englishwoman was compelled to reply to this direct question. She replied in English, as by a slip of the tongue, and used the vaguest of English expressions—

"Of course."

"Good! Very well, a danger threatens Berthe at this moment."

Fanny Smith said—

"Oh!"

But as this "Oh" was not accentuated in the French manner, it gave the banker no enlightenment whatever as to the degree of surprise, emotion or curiosity that his phrase, "a danger threatens Berthe," had aroused in the heart of the governess.

"A great danger," he continued. "I have confidence in you; with you, I lay my cards on the table. The Eastern crisis through which Europe is passing at this moment has recoiled on my house, on my business. I may . . . I may be declared a bankrupt in the forthcoming winding-up."

"Oh, so soon?" said the Englishwoman, betraying this time a slight astonishment, and not disguising the fact that it only came because she did not believe the event to be so near. The banker pondered a minute, smoothing his grey beard with his right hand; then, with his eyes fixed on those of the governess, and throwing into his voice all the firmness of which he was master, "My wife and I," he said, "are too near our end not to resign ourselves to

the catastrophe if it is necessary to submit. Our sacrifice is already made. 'But Berthe is twenty years old, and I am grieved when I imagine what her life will be if her father is arrested, condemned."

Fanny, who had met without faltering Haumont-Segré's glance, asked a question in her turn: "Then, as they may arrest you . . . there has been . . . how shall I put it? . . . fraud?"

The livid cheeks of the banker reddened. He answered drily—

"I have nothing to reproach myself with; I must ask you to believe that. The operations that the Court will endorse are undertaken by all my confrères with the tacit approval of their clients. It is a question of good luck or bad; a great banking business is not conducted like a herbalist's stock-in-trade. One thing alone matters: Berthe's future may be seriously impaired, first by my ruin and secondly by my conviction."

For a minute the ticking of the clock--its pendulum swung suspended in the grip of a bronze eagle--was the only thing that spoke in the silent room. The two speakers had withdrawn their glances from each other's faces. The Englishwoman said at last—

"What ought I to do then, sir?"

"You ought, Mademoiselle, to put the situation before my daughter as soon as she returns. You will thus spare us, my wife and I, a painful disclosure."

"Yes . . . yes . . . I can do that."

"Thank you, When you have made her understand what threatens me, it will be easy for you, with your experience and authority, to make her understand all that our smash would cost her. Our fortune engulfed, there will be nothing to receive from us later on . . .

and an indelible stain—yes, let us say the word, dishonour—on her name. You follow me, don't you?"

"Yes," said the Englishwoman; and then she added, with her features more rigid than ever: "You would like to ask her for her money, for her own money, so as to avoid these annoyances?"

For an instant Haumont-Segré was disconcerted. He had not foreseen that the Englishwoman would take the initiative in this way, and at the moment when she attacked the delicate point in her brutally comic sentence he was looking for a periphrase to express the same thing.

"Oh," he answered, stammering a little, "it will only be a matter of a loan, a rather large loan, without any risk." And his voice broke at this moment, and he looked at Fanny's knees instead of at her face; after which he began to speak more quickly, trying to conceal his embarrassment under a mass of words. "I have a most important matter in hand—an option for a loan to a town, a European town, admirably secure with all the guarantees. I have the option till the day after to-morrow. The Syndicate has been nearly formed already. If I put this loan through, there will be a gain of nearly two million francs. The eight hundred thousand francs cash that I am asking from Berthe to meet my indebtedness will be reimbursed to her at the end of the month with a premium of two hundred thousand francs. She will have saved her father and mother from bankruptcy, she will have protected her name, and she will have made a magnificent speculation. There it is!"

Mademoiselle murmured—

"I understand. I understand very well."

"I was sure that you would understand," replied Haumont. "I may count on you, then?"

"Yes, Monsieur, I shall certainly transmit to Berthe . . . I shall transmit everything that you have said. I shall do it."

"And . . ."—he rose; Fanny rose too—"and you will talk sense to her, won't you? You will make her realize what is really her own interest, won't you?"

"I will advise Berthe as to what I believe to be really her interest, be sure, Monsieur."

"But her interest is self-evident," returned the banker uneasily. "Even if it were not a matter, for both her and us, of a vital question, my proposal should remain very enticing to Berthe. You don't suppose that I would risk my daughter's fortune in an adventure? Besides, I will furnish her with all the details, and you too, Mademoiselle. You will be able to examine together the conditions of the loan, the subscriptions actually forthcoming from members of the Syndicate, the guarantees. Yes, yes, I insist on it. I want Berthe to look on this as a business proposition, and an excellent one for her."

The Englishwoman remained standing without giving any sign either of protest or of assent. Haumont-Segré, carried away by habit, hazarded the supreme argument—

"And just because it is a business proposition, I intend that the ordinary conditions of business shall be applied to it. You are the necessary intermediary, the right woman in the right place. If the affair is a success, we shall owe that success to you—Berthe and I shall. It would, then, be defrauding you if you did not benefit by it. Four thousand pounds

sterling will be at your disposal when the Syndicate has been formed."

This time Fanny Smith allowed a slight emotion to be seen: the tops of her cheeks, usually very red, grew pale.

"That sum of money," she said, "will be for Berthe or for me? I do not quite understand."

"For you, for you alone. But Berthe will have her two hundred thousand francs intact just the same. Are we agreed?"

Having immediately regained her usual coolness, the Englishwoman answered—

"I must ask you, Monsieur, to give me a little time to think. I am so little accustomed . . ."

"Think it over; but I have no doubt as to the result of your reflections. We are going presently, my wife and I, to lunch with the Ropart d'Anays. We shall be back towards five o'clock. You will have had your talk with Berthe by then?"

"Oh, certainly, Monsieur."

"Then, Mademoiselle, until this evening?"

The Englishwoman bowed; Haumont-Segré conducted her to the door of his study, and drew the bolt after her. Then he went to look for his wife, who was waiting in the next room. He found her standing in front of the door; she had endeavoured to hear as much as possible of the conversation.

"Well," said he, "she seems open to arguments, the virtuous Fanny?"

"You think so?" replied Madame Haumont-Segré, whose face remained anxious. "I didn't like the tone of her voice when she answered you."

"She didn't kick against it; she made no protest. She merely asked if the hundred thousand francs were

to be really for her, all by herself. Ah, my dear, that was a famous idea of yours ! ”

He kissed her. All the affection of long ago had come back to them, and thrown them incessantly into each other's arms from the beginning of this horrible crisis. The shortest separation seemed intolerable to them, and that is why they had wished to go together to Val d'Anay, where they were lured by the faint hope of picking up a few thousand-franc bills for the Syndicate, or perhaps a signature of Baron Ropart, who was so generous, so improvident. . . .

“ Paris, 5 Rue Montalivet,

“ To-day, Wednesday, 3 o'clock.

“ MY DEAR PARENTS,

“ As soon as I returned to the house to-day, Fanny repeated the conversation that papa had had with her this morning.

“ And so papa could believe, you could believe, both of you, that Fanny, for a wretched sum of money, would assist in robbing me for the benefit of creditors ruined by papa ! I must tell you at once that Fanny, while apologizing for repeating the proposal to me, and while qualifying it as it deserves to be qualified, has urged me with all her power to refuse it. It is none the less true that, if Fanny were not the high minded soul and the faithful heart that she is, I should be in danger of being duped and ruined by my own parents. This treachery has struck me to the heart ; I have wept much. On the other hand, I know now who wishes my welfare at the expense even of her own interests, and who thinks only of exploiting me. My dear parents, I am no longer able, at all events for a

few months, to meet you in this house, to talk to you. . . . It would be beyond my strength; I prefer to leave the house. I am going away.

"I am sorry to leave you at a time when you have serious anxieties. But I am not ignorant of the fact that everything I have would not save you, and I do not consider it fair that I should be dragged into your ruin, I, who am not responsible for it, I, who from the day on which Fanny explained to me the real meaning of the commerce of money, have detested papa's calling, or at least the manner in which he practises it. Besides, I shall not feel myself affected by the judicial consequences of acts in which I had not the slightest share. If my father's bankruptcy keeps away from me those who might pretend to my hand, what does that matter to me? I have no wish to marry; I have no taste for society; I shall be perfectly happy in the society of Fanny alone, particularly when hostile looks will no longer spy upon our friendship, and when wretched underhand dealings will no longer oppose it. As to public opinion, the good opinion of Fanny and the testimony of my own conscience are sufficient for me.

"I do not forget, however, that I have duties towards you, my dear parents. And on leaving you I wish to protect your real interests in a wiser way than by a chimerical loan to papa. You are ruined; look ruin in the face; you are not the first, in the business world, who have met with this misfortune. I cannot believe that papa has committed illegal acts: it is, then, only a smash-up as regards money. Do not contest it; allow the liquidation to take place. Fanny gives you this advice—Fanny, *who is not at all your enemy, whatever you may think about it,*

and who judges things intelligently and coldly. It seems to her, and to me too, that the wreck at least of mamma's *dot* might be saved—about two hundred and twenty thousand francs, we think. That, indeed, would be the assurance of your material lives, but I am anxious for my parents to have in their old age a larger and more comfortable existence. I undertake, then, to provide you with a maintenance pension of twelve thousand francs a year, starting from the day on which your financial situation passes the Court. It will be paid quarterly to you through my lawyer, M. Delaplanque, without there being any necessity for us to meet about it.

“But what I insist upon is, that you allow me to live absolutely by myself. I have a horror of scenes, recriminations, complaints. I have suffered too much from them at home, between the rages of papa and the imaginary illnesses of mamma; and if I am leaving you in this way, without embracing you for the last time, it is because I have really not the strength to bear an outburst of cries, reproaches and tears. I retain for you, none the less, a respectful, daughterly affection. When I am tempted to judge you, I immediately check myself with the thought that I should be like you, and like the majority of those of our set, if Providence had not placed on my path an exceptional guide, who has revealed to me at once the intellectual and the moral world, who has made me loathe all that is low, underhand, mean, and seek, before all other things, personal perfection. Between such a being and yourselves there could be no harmony: you *must* be hostile to her. . . . When I think that papa, in my presence, dared one day to insinuate that Fanny was addicted to drink! Fanny, who

drinks only water at meals from choice, and for whom doctors are compelled to prescribe alcoholic prescriptions, which she takes unwillingly. But let us forget all that. I imagine that you are now aware of the moral value of my dearest friend, the only person in the world whose esteem touches my heart, and whose presence is indispensable to me.

"My dear parents, I embrace you both very tenderly, and it is not without sorrow that I am leaving the house where I was born and where I have lived for nearly twenty years. But I must go. After what you have attempted to-day we could not meet at the same table; you must feel it just as surely as I do. I should like to hope that your anxieties will be determined for the best; in any case, you know now that you will be protected against material embarrassments by

"Your affectionate daughter,

"BERTHE."

Haumont-Segré, on his return from Val d'Anay, found this letter placed conspicuously on his study table. After reading the first words, he called his wife, who was undressing in her bedroom. They both read together the five-page letter, written in a large, sloping hand, bent like a row of shrubs under an implacable west wind. Completely overwhelmed, as they faced each other, passing the letter to each other from time to time and re-reading it, they stammered out bits of wretched sentences, despairing interjections—

"She didn't write that herself; it is a dictated letter."

"Ah, do you see? . . . I have felt it for a long time; she has grown to hate us."

"But what have we done to her, my God? One couldn't love a child more. . . ."

Madame Haumont-Segré sobbed out—

"It's my fault. . . . It is I who had the idea of tempting Fanny, and Berthe is right. It was wrong. We risked making her lose her fortune. . . . Yes, yes, I divined it all along; I admit it! Oh, when I think that it's my fault . . ."

She threw herself on the cushions of the sofa where she had been sitting, pressing her hands against her heart.

Suddenly the banker rose and walked towards the door, waving his great arms.

"Where are you going?" asked Julie.

"I am going to kill her."

"Your daughter?"

"No, the Englishwoman. She is the cause of everything. She shall pay her debt. I will kill her."

And he repeated instinctively in the empty air the gesture that he had made the night before, the gesture of crunching a neck between his powerful fingers.

"Maxime!" implored Madame Haumont-Segré.

And as he was really going out, she murmured—

"Stay, I beg of you; I am so ill!"

He had heard her many times, during the thirty-three years of their marriage, complain of her health and ask for sympathy for her complaints, but never in this deep tone, half suppressed as though it were an involuntary admission. He knelt down beside his wife.

"What is it? What is the matter with you? You are suffering?"

She made a sign of admission.

"But what do you feel?"

She said in a very low voice, "As if the very life of my heart were being exhausted. It's horrible; the pain spreads through every bone of my chest. I felt it to-night for the first time. And now, when you wanted to go out to kill that wretched girl, it has come back. Don't leave me, I implore you. You promise me?"

"Yes, I promise you. I won't leave you. Come, calm yourself, calm yourself."

He threw his arms round the sick woman, kissing the grey, disordered hair, the poor wrinkled forehead, the eyes that were almost dissolved in tears.

"Take courage, my dear; the storm will pass. We'll let it pass. That horrible Englishwoman, who, as far as I can see, knows my affairs as well as I do myself, is right. Don't let us try to save the ship; it is lost. We shall live on the remainder of your *dot*. I will look after you; you will get well, and then . . . then one will think about settling the governess' account."

And even as he fondled his companion he was making again, instinctively the gesture of wringing a neck with the fingers of his right hand.

CHAPTER II

THE BARON'S HORSE

THERE is a part of Europe, the Faroe Islands, where it rains, it appears, three hundred days a year. For the remainder of the year a soft mist fills in the intervals of the rain.

Certainly it does not rain so much in our Sologne; it scarcely rains any more there than in Touraine or in Anjou; but when certain spring rains begin to fall, an inhabitant of the Faroe Islands would believe himself in his own home, and would say to himself: "Here it is for three hundred days!" One feels then above the fields and the woods, suspended in the clouds, such a menacing density of water that never, it seems, will it finish dropping, that the oozy soil and the dripping house-tops, the trees that sweat moisture through their soaked leaves, through their branches and glittering trunks, will never become dry again. From every direction the rain hems you in, imposing immobility and silence upon the resigned country, tranquil, invincible rain, whether it is filtering through the tiles, slates, thatch, treacherously to invade the habitation of men, whether it is falling upon the luckless peasant who has his covered cart on the shimmering road, or upon the impatient keeper who intends to keep watch in spite of everything under the scanty shelter of the woods. The birds are silent, except a few stubborn hens, who

insist upon marauding in the morass of the yards; the farms are asleep crowded with smoking cattle. However, gliding over the saturated earth the water pours into the ditches, into the drains, into the furrows; a thousand new currents twine and whisper, whilst slowly, surely, the rivers swell, and the bushes on the steep banks raise above the flood that has become brutal—their slanting tops, like the head of a shipwrecked man, who struggles before being engulfed.

On the day after the visit that the Haumont-Segrés had paid the Roparts, this Faroe Islands weather had been overwhelming the country about Romorantin for the last six days. The result was, for the inhabitants of Val d'Avey, big and little, master and servants, a state of nervous tension which, in its turn, made the rain yet more intolerable. Everybody had but one desire—to escape from the house. It had rained in this way ever since the departure of Rosalie, and no one had failed to connect these two ill turns of destiny; Rosalie, summoned to her own country to her aunt, her only relation, who was seriously ill—and the perpetual rain. Had Rosalie been at home they would have been able to bear the rain. She used to exert herself so, in a case like this to invent round games; her good humour used so to radiate through the house that they would end by forgetting the lowering sky, the sopping fields, the impossibility of walking. When the impatience of everybody became unbearable, she knew how to inspire the Baron and his children with determination to go out. Wrapped up in mackintoshes, booted as if for shooting on a marsh, they would go out altogether, defying the floods, towards the town, where they would make a few

purchases, after which they would return and reach Val d'Anay soaked to the skin, but proud of the performance and with their nerves relaxed.

This time, after six days of downpour endured without Rosalie, the inhabitants of Val d'Anay felt like biting. In vain the Abbé Vicart, a priest of the diocese, who had been lately introduced into the château as the tutor of Hector and Jean, an elderly, shrewd man, but a jolly fellow for all that, who knew how to make himself agreeable when occasion arose, attempted to take the place of the absent Rosalie. He lacked the rosy cheeks, the fair hair, the appetizing figure, the eyes and the laugh of the young girl. Hector and Jean became refractory under these velvet reins; Latin scarcely made any progress, nor did mathematics, and the worthy ecclesiastic himself felt his energy diluting in the all-pervading inoisture. Henriette, deprived of her governess, proclaimed herself on a holiday; her mother, upon whose shoulders the whole weight of the housekeeping now fell, had hardly time to pay attention to her. The result of this was endless battles between this tom-boy and her two brothers. Each boy in turn would unite with his sister to vanquish the other. Or, the trio together, cloistered by the rain, would form an alliance to undertake some disastrous expedition in the house which invariably ended in the destruction of a piece of furniture or in an accident to somebody. It was the same even down to the twills, who, in their double cradle, raised a tiny standard of rebellion. They clamoured for Rosalie in all the proceedings of their life, and as she could not be given to them, for instead of Rosalie there was a maid to look after them, Lucy, an ugly little daughter of Sologne, stupid and

peevish, who, besides, always suffered from toothache and wore a bandage under her chin day and night,—the most ordinary events, such as the morning bath and the evening soup aroused dramas in which the Baroness' Christian patience exhausted itself.

Still, the most unnerved of them all was undoubtedly the master of the house; he complained of insomnia and pains in the stomach, thus accounting for a pale face and an anxious expression that had been noticed even before the rain, even before the departure of Rosalie Boisset. His wife was uneasy about him; she found his moods less even, more absent-minded. She was amazed at his taste for solitude and meditation, which was such a contrast to his usual sociability. But the increase of her domestic duties after the governess' departure prevented the Baroness from observing her husband closely. The Abbé Vicart, however, whose little black eyes were ceaselessly alert beneath his tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles made *in petto* two observations: first, that of them all, the Baron seemed the least upset when the letter summoning Rosalie to Arlon arrived at Val d'Anay: secondly, that, on the other hand, his nervousness increased considerably after Rosalie had left the house. 'It is true that the rain coincided with this departure, and for a man whose life consisted in galloping on his half-bred César, in hunting during the season, in shooting with ferrets, in fishing in the pond, in playing tennis with the children and a few neighbours, being shut up indoors was a severe penance. But it was precisely this that the Abbé Vicart noticed—Henri Ropart d'Anay did not appear to suffer so terribly from this imprisonment. He was not to be seen, as usual in such a case,

with his forehead glued to the window-panes, scrutinizing the horizon and the clouds; he made no more hurried escapes to the nearest farm. He was inclined rather to be moody, lost in his own thoughts, holding for hours together in his hand a paper which he scarcely read or remaining lost in thought, without moving a card, in front of a table at a game of Patience, and only breaking from this depressed silence to burst into a rage at the slightest pretext against a servant, one of the children, or the Baroness. His only distraction was going to the stables to see César, giving him sugar, and supervising his grooming. At other times he would suddenly take Hector or Jean by the shoulders, look at them for a long time and say affectionate words to them; or he would draw Henriette to him and cover her with kisses. The Abbé surprised him with his eyes fastened on the Baroness, who was peacefully attending to her household duties, looking at her tenderly, his lips moving without uttering a word, while, at moments, the corners of his eyelids were moist with tears.

In this atrophy, the Haumont-Segrés' visit had been a short diversion; the children, who had the run of the pantry and the kitchen, amused themselves with the preparations for a luncheon more elaborate than usual. The Baron and the Baroness, having received a discreet hint from Croze, anticipated a demand for money. They had discussed this topic the evening before and again this very morning; the Baroness was agreeably surprised to find her husband strongly resolved on a refusal. He pleaded the fresh expenses necessitated by the boys' education, certain urgent repairs in the agricultural buildings, the purchase of a corn drill for rich pasture in time for the approaching

season. In connection with these matters he showed his wife a model budget, minutely checked, not only for the current year, but for the two following ones. The sources of income were marked down opposite the column of expenditure and in this work could be recognized the love of method and active patience of Rosalie. "You see, my dear," said the Baron, "even if I were suddenly taken (which God forbid) you would have no material vexation to fear." And he kissed the Baroness, who was herself moved. The result of these resolves and of this conversation was that the Haumont-Segrés, after lunching at Val d'Anay, had to return to Paris without bringing anything with them beyond words of genuine sympathy. But as soon as they had gone, the Baron, whose excellent heart suffered for having refused help to his unhappy friends, fell into his irritable, melancholy mood, which was still further aggravated by disagreeable news. The incessant rains had ended by doing damage. A roof of the outbuildings had fallen in; the water was invading the laundry; it was necessary to move hurriedly the contents of the fruit-loft. The Cher was overflowing; the Farm of Bauges which the Baron possessed in the neighbourhood of Selles, more than twelve miles from Val d'Anay, had had to be precipitately abandoned. The whole crop of hay on both banks was lost. There were rumours of cattle having been washed into the river; it was even said that a small driver of turkey-cocks had lost his life.

The following day at dawn it was still raining. The Abbé Vicart, persistently optimistic, assured them, in spite of this fact, "that the barometer was better"; it was not rising: oh no, but as a matter of

fact, when they shook it, the needle, after a few skips, resumed its old point on the disc. The Baron, plunged in a wordless anger, went as usual to supervise the grooming of César, an operation which the impatience of the beast, who had been too long shut up, made rather uncomfortable. Then he retired into a little room, full of guns, cartridges, agricultural books and specimens of cereals, which he called his study; there he remained until lunch. The post as usual arrived while they were at table. It contained—besides the newspapers full of alarming news about the rising of the Cher and the Loire—a letter with a foreign stamp, that was feverishly opened by the Baroness, who cried out: "If only it tells us of her return!" Alas! Rosalie was not announcing her return. The aunt in Arlon was not any worse, but on the other hand, she was not any better, and her illness—Rosalie sometimes said "her illness" and sometimes "her trouble," without being more precise—would perhaps necessitate the presence of her niece for some time longer. Besides, the letter was brief, and its reading—which the Baroness accomplished aloud to the whole table—produced a vague discomfort, which no one had the courage to acknowledge. One would have wished it more affectionate; each of them would have liked to find a word for him or for her. But, "I wish to be respectfully remembered to everybody"—that is what they had to share between them. Hector, Jean and Henriette made a grimace. The Baron gnawed his fair moustache. The Abbé Vicart studied attentively the label of a bottle of "Eau d'Evian," and seemed to be learning the words on it by heart. The Baroness was thoughtful.

But scarcely were they in the drawing-room for

coffee when their faces brightened. Suddenly, as under the stroke of a fairy's wand, the sky paled at the zenith and a feeble, trembling gleam of the sun came to play upon the coffee-pot and the cups. It disappeared almost immediately, but for all that, it had been seen; it had announced that the sun was not dead. They began to hope again. The children planned a walk as far as the Bonne-Heure, a neighbouring stream, that the rains had transformed into a large river. And the Baron said—

"If there is only a break in the clouds, I shall take advantage of it to give César an airing; unless he gets one, he will smash his box."

The rain began again very soon in a furious down-pour; then it stopped altogether for ten minutes; the whole imprisoned household went out on the terrace breathing in the damp air and examining the horizon. It was generally agreed that the sky presented no longer the same dreadful uniformity of dissolving mists. On a clear grey background, the clouds, more or less sombre, very jagged, their rags scattered on their path, were chasing each other. A new shower did not succeed in driving the châtelains of Val d'Anay from the terrace. Besides, it lasted only a short time, and when it was over the round whiteness of the sun, masked by the mist as by a rough glass, could be seen. The birds took courage to chirp from tree to tree. Nature was dripping; and the noises from all the hurrying waters, streams, hollow roads, swollen rivers, united in a sustained, distant, but almost terrifying roar.

Motionless in a corner of the terrace, the Baron looked out and listened, while the children, grouped around the Abbé, marvelled at the changed scenery of

the country. The woods which formed the background of this scenery, which had scarcely been seen during the last eight days, now reappeared so close that one could see their broken branches. But now they seemed to encircle a beautiful pond in which the wrinkled sheaths of oaks and the silver sheaths of birches were reflected. Jean, the youngest of the two boys, who had the eyes and ears of a Mohican, specified the limits of this huge liquid sheet "as far as the big young elm of Fragnet . . . to within twenty-five yards, more or less, of the rye field . . ." He also insisted that he could distinguish between the different roars of the unleashed waters: "There is not only the fall from the mill on the Bonne-Heure, I am sure. I hear something like another torrent, nearer to Fragnet. . . . Perhaps beneath the sluice of the pond." They listened to him, for he was seldom wrong and never asserted anything beyond what his over-sharpened senses revealed to him.

"Papa."

"My dear?"

The Baron started as his left arm was seized by the little Mohican.

"We can go out with M. l'Abbé to see the rising of the Bonne-Heure, can't we?"

"Certainly, certainly." For my part, I'm going to take advantage of the clearing to take some of the rust off César's legs."

He picked up the tall, slender child—his favourite—by the waist, raised him square in front of him, looked at him with a tenderness by which the child felt himself vaguely moved, kissed him, placed him on the ground again, and returned abruptly to the house. A servant was removing the coffee-cups.

"Jules, do you know where Madame is?" the Baron asked—

"Madame has gone as far as the fruit-loft to look at the damage."

He hesitated and then asked again—

"Where are Violette and Marguerite?"

"They must be asleep upstairs. . . . Would M. le Baron like me to ask Lucy?"

"No, it's all right, go."

He waited an instant, motionless in the drawing-room. Then, making up his mind, he traversed the hall to the stable-yard. As the servants had not finished lunch, he himself saddled César, with the old saddle for rainy days. In the saddle-room he found his riding kit, which was always waiting for him there, ready for expeditions undertaken on the spur of the moment: the old boots, the old cape, a brown felt hat very much worn. The stallion, maddened by the hope of fresh air and a run, kicked like a catapult against the side of the box.

"Steady, César, steady," said the Baron, "we are going."

Having ascertained by a glance that he was quite alone, he made the sign of the Cross. His lips moved while glancing towards the rough joists of the stable; his face lit up with an expression of deep supplication, a sob without tears shook him. César, however, arched his powerful neck towards him and distended his nostrils. He watched him with large glassy eyes, and neighed softly. Ropart d'Anay made the sign of the Cross again, put his hat on, and traced on the high wall with his thumb and index finger joined together an invisible cross. Then he unfastened the stallion, who followed him on a bridle, snorting. A

few seconds later, the children and the Abbé, who had not left the terrace, perceived the horse and rider going at a hand-gallop along the private road, which, nearly two miles further on, rejoins the Romorantin road at Croix-sur-Cher. Hector, Henriette and Jean uttered cries of joy and waved their handkerchiefs. But doubtless the Baron did not hear them for he did not turn round. For a long time, the moving speck was followed by their eyes until the corner of the wood hid it. Jean, the little Mohican, continued to listen. He said at last—

“Papa has turned down the side of Croix-sur-Cher.”

The Abbé, Henriette and Hector, endeavoured to verify Jean's assertion. But they could hear only the loud noise of the waters descending, as it seemed, from the whole horizon and, nearer, the clamourings of chaffinches and sparrows revived by hope of sunlight. Eager themselves to have some fun, the children dragged off their teacher—who pleaded that it was the ordinary time for lessons—as far as the Baroness had gone. A special holiday was demanded and granted for that afternoon so that they might go and “see the flood of the Bonne-Heure.” And soon there remained in the château with the servants only the energetic manageress of the house, who inspected carefully her home, examining and noting one by one—as Rosalie had got into the way of doing after every storm or any long downpour—those crimes of the water, almost unfelt in towns, but so formidable for the lonely house that presents, without any protection at all, all its façades and roofs to these inclemencies.

The sky—towards six o'clock—had almost entirely cleared up, and only a motionless line of clear grey

clouds still hung in the south-east, gradually receding like an army corps in retreat, when the Abbé Vicart and the three children returned to the château. They were surprised to see on the edge of the private road, in front of the park entrance, Madame Ropart d'Anay who was watching them. Henriette ran up to her.

"You haven't met Papa?" the Baroness asked.

"No, mother, hasn't he got back?"

The Baroness shook her head. The Abbé and the two boys joined them. Questions were exchanged. They were surprised. He had left at half-past two and had not returned at six. Where could the Baron have gone?

"In any case there is no need for uneasiness," the Abbé Vicart observed. "Since I have been at Val d'Anay, some of M. le Baron's rides have kept him away still longer."

"When he went to Preuilly, to see our cousin de Bourquoy," said Hector.

"And when he went to consult the doctor at Orleans about Zalie."

"Yes," said the Baroness, making her way slowly and, as it were, unwillingly to the château under the escort of the tutor and her children. "Only on those occasions he went to a particular place where he was going to dismount, rest himself and allow his horse to rest. And then we were informed about it. . . . To-day, he has gone off without even a word of warning, as if he were not leaving the *demesne* . . ."

"He said that he only wished to give César an airing," said the little Mohican.

And suddenly he became silent. He remembered how his father had looked at him tenderly and then

pressed him against his heart before leaving. He wished to tell that, but he did not know how to tell it. A vague and yet powerful thought which was inside him found no expression. •

They re-entered the house. Madame Ropart d'Anay said to the Abbé—

“Henri was upset yesterday evening when the news from Baugis arrived here, but I can't believe that he has given César a run of nearly twenty-five miles, which would take six hours at least . . . and without telling us !”

“M. le Baron has perhaps only pushed on as far as Cher to find out about the flood, and get news about the surrounding country, without, however, going as far as Baugis. Jean asserts that the horse turned down beside Croix. Isn't that so, Jean ?”

“Yes,” said the child, with a start; he was still absorbed in the warm memory that was a little painful, of that paternal embrace.

“Croix is only about five miles from here; M. le Baron might have dismounted at my colleague's, the Abbé Poitou's, or at Madame de Lugregé's.”

“It is possible, after all,” said the Baroness. “But how late it is. Fortunately, there are still two hours of daylight left.” •

The children went upstairs to their rooms to take off their muddy clothes and dress for dinner, which was served at half-past seven. Before dinner the Abbé was accustomed to bring them together in the schoolroom and, without their having to touch a pen or running the risk of dirtying their fingers, he would give them a little address, on the Christian life, that he knew how to peg very adroitly on to the trivial events of the day. This evening, seeing them im-

patient, startled by the slightest sound—for at five minutes past seven the Baron had not yet returned—he meditated a little longer than usual before beginning to speak. And his young audience itself was struck with the grave tone in which he spoke.

"My children," he said, "we are all a little anxious at this moment. The head of the family is away and he gave no warning that his absence would be prolonged in this manner. All our thoughts, then, converge towards him; we would like to compel time to run more quickly, so as to be already at the minute when your father would embrace you. Well, I want to tell you what act of energy God exacts in such a case from good little Christians like yourselves. It is precisely to fight this feverish anxiety by a preliminary act of submission to His will, and not the submission merely of the lips! How many people repeat daily the words of the *Pater*: 'Thy will be done,' at the very moment when they are endeavouring to deflect the Divine will so as to make it conform to theirs! God asks from you in hours of distress like these, the acceptance in advance of what His sovereign decisions have decreed. Perform this act of submission. Perform it with your whole heart. Say: 'O God, I trust Papa to You; You know how necessary he is to us, and how we love him; may Your bounty give us strength to submit to Your purpose.'"

At this moment Jean rose from his chair and cried out with his face distorted—

"But Papa isn't dead, is he M. l'Abbé?"

The Abbé replied without hesitation—

"I am convinced that your father is alive and in good health."

He placed such an accent of assurance on these

words, that the three children felt themselves comforted and asked him no more questions.

In the meantime, the first stroke of the bell announcing the evening meal had sounded. Half-an-hour went by; the whole family was re-united in the drawing-room. The Baroness who, up till now, had maintained her attitude of calm, began to weaken. The day was growing to a close and taking away with it that imperious energy of resistance and hope that light infuses into human beings. With the advancing night the atmosphere of catastrophe entered the house. The usual order of things was turned upside down; and, as on a wrecked ship, social distances were broken down. The servants were seen entering the drawing-room one after the other, summoned to give their opinion and reveal any information that they might have been keeping back. Had the Baron confided to any one of them his intention of taking a long ride, of going, for example, to Baugis, to find out the effects of the flood? Had any one seen him from the moment he had left the private road? The butler, the little valet, who acted also as groom and stable-boy, the cook, the gardener, Lucy, still with the handkerchief round her chin, soon formed in the midst of the huge drawing-room with its white wainscoting, hung with pictures of ancestors, a clamorous and unchecked group, in which rose discussions and contradictions and in which the language of the pantry and the stables had full play. The Baroness no longer governed them, and the Abbé, taking care not to impose silence, appeared by his attention and also by his questions to encourage them to speak. As for the children—who had been absolutely reassured by their tutor's words: "Your father

is alive and in good health"—all this noise and upheaval of the accustomed decorum began to amuse them. A pleasant word from the gardener, a pompous reply from the butler, provoked stifled laughter from them. For the rest, the collection of useful information seemed meagre. The Baron had not announced his intention of taking a long ride to any of the servants. The little groom, however, had observed, he stated, that "M. le Baron had been more than usually taken up with César this week." But would not the inaction, necessitated by the rain, explain more frequent visits to the stables? The butler narrated that before leaving the house M. le Baron had asked: "Where was Madame la Baronne, and where were Mlles. Marguerite and Violette?" The keeper, who came last, with his long boots, his gun slung across his shoulder, exhaling an odour of the moist forest and of sweating dogs, had, indeed, seen M. le Baron on the Croix road, but only for a second: "M. le Baron had settled down to a trot as if for a good distance." Such was the keeper's contribution. In addition, replying to a question of the Abbé, he declared that "he had observed one thing . . . that M. le Baron had not given him, during the last eight days, the usual orders to see the ferrets . . . doubtless it was on account of this cursed rain."

At this moment, Jean Ropart d'Anay recollected for the third time the look and embrace of his father on the terrace; and more than the two other times he was conscious that this look and this embrace were extraordinary incidents and that there was a connection between them and the prolonged absence of the Baron. He was again on the point of saying: "Papa

looked at me and kissed me in a different way from usual a little while ago." But this time again he said nothing. He would have spoken before his brother and sister, before the servants, before the Abbé, but without being able to explain to himself why, his mother's presence embarrassed him.

"I'll tell it to-night to M. l'Abbé," he resolved. And all at once his thoughts flew elsewhere. Standing up before the half-open window, he listened to the sounds in the distance, and said to himself: "There is a slow train from Romorantin, passing over the viaduct."

The congress of servants was turning into cacophony and even into wrangling; they were dismissed from the room. The keeper and the groom were dispatched on bicycles each in one of the directions that led to the private road. It was well past eight o'clock. The children had dinner with the Abbé; all four ate with good appetites. The Baroness had remained in the drawing-room refusing to sit down to dinner. Between two courses the Abbé, carefully swallowing the last mouthful and wiping his lips meticulously, went to exhort and console her. He found her on the look-out, her hands feverish and her eyes red. She kept on repeating obstinately: "Why was I not called when he asked for me? Why was I not called?"

The Abbé persisted in his firm hope that the Baron was not kept away by any accident in which his life or his health was endangered. But the Baroness, struck in her turn, as her daughter and sons had been, by his tone of assurance, having asked him: "Well, M. l'Abbé, do you then know something more than I do?" He immediately beat a retreat, protesting

that he expressed only an idea, and that he interpreted a personal conviction.

The children usually went to bed at nine o'clock, but on this night of anxiety neither the Abbé nor the Baroness could insist on the application of the rule. Henriette, Hector and Jean were already too old, all three of them, not to be associated in the general uneasiness. There was no more question of going to bed. The Baroness alone went upstairs as usual to inspect the twins' bedroom. Deprived of Rosalie, the twins slept less soundly and more nervously than usual, and on this night in particular, their instinct of young animals scented the unusual in the house, and at nine o'clock they still opened their four blue eyes to the deep despair of Lucy. Calming them and sending them to sleep, diverted their mother for some time from her distress. In the meantime, the Abbé and the children had left the drawing-room, had gone down to the park, and then to the private road. Does it not seem to those who wait that by going to meet the absent one they will not only meet him sooner, but will also exercise a mysterious attraction on him so that he will know better how to take his bearings and quicken his steps? The night was clear although moonless. The west was still purpling with vague twilight reflections. The sky, pale and absolutely pure, was becoming slowly studded with stars. Nearly level with the ground, chiefly over the lawns, a light layer of mist was trailing. The unleashed torrents still roared in the distance with a tumult accentuated by the silence of night: nearer, in the ditches of the private road, along which the Abbé and the three children were walking, the water ran, on the contrary, with a quick

and murmuring noise as of a mountain stream. . . . They walked on quite easily at first, listening for sounds, scrutinizing the horizon, then unconsciously they increased their pace. They were in a hurry to reach the point where the private road and the departmental road crossed each other.

They had been walking for less than five minutes when Jean stopped, and said—

"There is Papa."

His three companions listened.

"I hear nothing," said the Abbé.

"There's Papa," repeated Jean. "César is coming back by the Croix road. . . . Oh, he's in a hurry . . ."

Like a true little Mohican, he threw himself on the ground and glued his ear to the roadway. Then getting on his feet again—

"Yes, it's César all right. . . . He's galloping, galloping! Papa must be riding him hard. Only there's another noise, too, an odd noise, a noise as of iron, as though an officer were galloping with his sabre."

"Ah, I hear it, too," said the Abbé.

Soon the sound of the horse's gallop became perceptible to ordinary ears. The three children huddled themselves together against the Abbé's soutane; they did not express, nor did the Abbé himself, the uneasiness that was beginning to grip them. This gallop, the noise of which increased, was too dizzy, a gallop of flight or pursuit; the haste of return was not enough to explain it. Thus, in the night, in which an indefinable brightness persisted, the little human group, motionless on the road, waited so packed together that they could hear each other's heart-beats. A sudden

increase in the noise of galloping came to them; it was the horse who was turning at the signpost of the private road. Their eyes strained on the shadow, trying to see in spite of everything. . . . Hallucination or reality, here was the moving black thing, which detached itself from the unchangeable blackness that loomed, like a visible hole. . . . The four watchers ranged themselves instinctively on the lower side of the path. Their sight and hearing alike wished to take shelter, to avoid hearing, to avoid seeing, and yet the effort of the senses became concentrated and intensified. A figure of a maddened horse, a horse of the Apocalypse, the colour of mud and night, about whose flanks hung, tattered things, and whose horizontal head, distended nostrils, ears lying flat back and eyes of fire, they will always remember—a terrible figure had sprung out of the darkness, much more suddenly than they expected. The wind, stirred by his passing, had brushed their cheeks, and then the figure again disappeared into the night so that they could not explain how it came upon them so quickly.

"What is it?" said the Abbé, in a troubled voice.

"It is César," replied Jean, who had seen. "But Papa is not on his back; the stirrups are dangling . . ."

And bravely he started towards the château in pursuit of the phantom. The others followed one by one. Hector, who did not run so fast as his younger brother, then Henriette, then the Abbé, soon left behind, soon at the end of his breath, soon reduced to slacken his speed in order to regain it. He muttered in an undertone as when reading his breviary—

"My faith! I understand it no longer at all."

He stopped again.

"Unless . . ."

And this time his curiosity to verify the new hypothesis spurred him so well that he started again for the château almost at an athlete's pace. In the yard of the outbuildings, by the light of stable lanterns and bicycle lamps, the servants had assembled round César, panting, trembling in all his long, thin limbs, his eyes now almost lifeless, foam on his teeth, pieces of reed and twigs caught in the saddle and about the stirrups, the snaffle broken, and his coat so terribly soiled with dry mire, that he had the appearance of a statue of mud. Around him gathered the whispering clamour of frightened folk: "Fallen into the river . . . the flood. . . . Perhaps M. le Baron has been saved." Henriette, Hector and Jean ran to the Abbé, and cried out through their sobs: "Papa, M. l'Abbé, Papa has been thrown! Where is Papa now?" And now the groom returns on his bicycle, he has been passed by César at the top of the Fragnet hill; he turned back at once, but César was going so fast! "Oh! M. l'Abbé, you said Papa was well," Hector sobs in a tone of reproach. The Abbé soothes him with a gesture and approaches the horse, so exhausted now, that one expects every instant to see him collapse on the ground. The Abbé alone seems to have preserved all his coolness; he observes that the belly-band holds by one single buckle; he discovers that the buckles of the other two girths are intact as also are the girths themselves. Hence, they have not given way in some sudden accident, but have been unfastened by hand, and the third buckle by chance has proved strong enough not to break all through that frenzied gallop. The Abbé says to the children: "Nothing proves that your father was in the saddle

when César fell into the water or when he bolted. Look : one would say that César bolted while he was being unsaddled. But we must go and see your Mamma."

He arrived at the drawing-room. The Baroness, exhausted by fatigue, worn out by waiting, had fallen asleep in an arm-chair. She had heard nothing, either of César's return or of the reports from the yard. She woke up with a start at the Abbé's step, and faltered out—

"Henri, Henri?"

"Madame," said the Abbé, "we know nothing definite, but in any case you will have need of your Christian fortitude."

CHAPTER III

A FAMILY COUNCIL

IN the Corbelliers' flat, where there were extravagant specimens—ranging from the Louis XVI mode to that of Belgian art—of the genre furniture which is the rage in Paris during this phase of the twentieth century, one solitary room had escaped the fashion: the study of the master of the house. Like almost all timid, enslaved people, Maurite Corbellier clung doggedly to a certain number of obscure aims and pitiable self-assertions. Just as conquered people hide their patriotism under the colour of a ribbon or the air of a refrain, Maurice Corbellier, heir to the Auguste Corbellier porcelain works, retained in his heart the cult for his father, the inventor and founder of the house. So, in spite of Emmeline's quarrels and Jacques' gibes, the son's study in the Rue Montaigne reproduced exactly, framing as it did the same furniture, the decorative effect that Auguste Corbellier, in the time of Fortune's first smiles, had established towards 1885 in the Avenue d'Aubervilliers. It was not the most brilliant epoch of French taste. Emmeline and Jacques might well ridicule the cornices, the doors, the panelling painted black, set with red streaks, the whole furniture—the writing-table, the set of pigeon-holes, the chairs made out of pear-wood that was no less black, the seats covered with granite-red; on the walls a paper imitating as closely as

possible the same red granite; on the mantelpiece a clock and candlesticks of black marble decorated with bronze. The clock represented an Ariadne, freely imitated from that of Dagneker, seated on a peaceful tiger. The dial was black, while the figures and hands were gilt; the candlesticks held no candles, but quite motionless flames of gilt bronze; between their branches two peacock's feathers shot up—one for each candlestick—the same as those with which Maurice as a child used sometimes to ask his father's permission to play. Yes, this room bore the date of that curious epidemic of the sombre when Parisians introduced the hanging of black silk curtains over their windows; it was mournful and faded. All the same, after having passed through all the rooms furnished in Emmeline's taste with fustian of the pseudo-antique and of modern eccentricity, one experienced, on entering Maurice Corbellier's study, that sensation of relief that the meeting of an honest provincial lawyer gives one among equivocal foreigners and bogus artists. And, to tell the truth, it was the only room in the house that possessed style in the absolute sense of that word; that is to say, harmony and character.

This morning Maurice Corbellier, in blue pyjamas and with his scanty hair in confusion, was seated in his curule arm-chair of black pear-wood before his writing-table of black pear-wood draped with a red table-cloth. The table was covered with a number of scattered newspapers. Corbellier took them up and threw them aside, one after the other, with movements of feverish impatience, clackings of his tongue against his palate, and glances towards the black door with its red streaks that opened into the rest of the flat. He muttered—

"Half-past ten; *she* ought to be ready. Or, at least, she should allow me to go and see her. . . . And Croze is coming! It was, indeed, a pity to trouble him!"

The black door opened: it was not Emmeline who entered the room; Emmeline, for whom her husband had been waiting for the last three-quarters of an hour. It was not Emmeline. But none the less Corbellier's face brightened. Loute, dressed for going to her class; Loute in a royal-blue frock and a fresh blouse, her fair hair nicely drawn back; Loute, with the savour of her bath and clean linen about her, came to kiss her father.

"My little girl, my little girl."

He took her on his knees, and their two unpleasing faces, which were so like each other (the same branlike complexion, the same features, awkwardly traced as though they had been left unfinished, the same pale pigment in hair and eyes), their two faces brushed against each other tenderly and happily. Maurice kept saying: "My little girl, my little girl," and Loute purred: "Papa, my dear papa." This daily effusion having calmed down, the little girl noticed the unusual quantity of newspapers.

"What's happening? Is there war?"

And immediately she read in bold headlines: "*The Mystery of Val d'Anay.*"

"Val d'Anay," she asked, "that's Henriette Ropart's?"

"Yes. It's a terrible thing, my little Loute. Your friend's father met with an accident on horseback, the day before yesterday, beside the Cher, which has overflowed its banks through the recent rains. He fell into the river. His hat has been found, also a

handkerchief and a jacket that have been thrown up from the water. And the horse returned all alone to Val d'Anay."

Loute had listened, her fingers playing with the facings of the blue pyjamas. She fixed her eyes on those of her father and said sedately—

"But, since all that is known, why do they call it the *mystery* of Val d'Anay?"

Maurice gave a little cough.

"Because the Baron's body has not been found, and because no one, in fact, witnessed the accident. Then there are conjectures; you understand?"

"Yes," said Loute, whose imagination was romantic. "Perhaps he will return ~~in~~—in a great many years, with his hair quite white and with a lot of . . . mon . . ."

The black door opened again: Emmeline Corbellier appeared, in a morning *deshabille* that was perfectly elegant. But these adornments scarcely concealed, any more than did the two hours of attention given to her toilette, the ravages of anxiety and insomnia. Her face evoked the unpleasant idea of something boiled and afterwards rubbed with white fat. In vain Loute jumped to the floor. She did not avoid a reprimand.

"Loute, I have already forbidden you to sprawl on your father's knees. At your age it is grotesque; it is unbecoming."

"She wasn't on my knees," said Maurice, lying shamelessly. "She came in to kiss me before starting for her class. Run along, my dear. . . . But you, Emmeline, how do you feel this morning?"

While Loute was making her escape, exchanging with her father a glance of affectionate complicity,

Emmeline seated herself in the arm-chair next the black table.

"I," she said, "I haven't been able to close an eye. Just look at me!" And coming at once to the point that caused her anxiety: "Croze has still not answered?"

Corbellier nodded in the affirmative, and immediately Emmeline brightened up.

"You ought to have told me! I was so uneasy after that useless telephoning yesterday; that absence that one could make nothing out of . . ."

"My dear," Corbellier excused himself, "I've been waiting for you more than an hour."

"Then he is coming?"

"He ought to be here now. I got on to him by telephone before eight o'clock, while he was still in bed. I told him all about the trouble that Jacques is giving us. He does not change his mind. He says that we should cover ourselves with ridicule if we permitted this marriage . . ."

"My word!"

"And that he will undertake to have the Italian expelled if she persists."

"You see, there's no one like him for putting things straight," cried Emmeline enthusiastically. "Ah, there's a friend, if you like! But why was he away and nowhere to be found yesterday?"

"My dear, that's a regular drama! Croze was called down to Val d'Anay by telegram, because his brother-in-law has disappeared."

"Baron Ropart?"

"Yes; the papers are full of nothing else. Look, the *Matin* . . . the *Journal*. The day before yesterday the Baron left his place on horseback to visit a

property of his beside the Cher. In the evening the horse returned alone, covered with mud, the stirrups flapping."

"Then Henri was drowned?"

Corbellier made an evasive gesture.

"They believe that at Val d'Anay, or at least they say it. But, according to the newspapers, the police have another idea."

"A trick?"

"Yes, a trick, with the appearance of an accident."

Emmeline shrugged her shoulders.

"That's idiotic. Henri adored his wife. He was a model husband and father."

"Monsieur," said the valet from the funereal door, "M. Croze is here."

Emmeline rose, her face suddenly so transfused with blood, her eyes so reanimated by nervousness that she was young at the moment when her smile of the inalienable lover welcomed the Under-Secretary for War. She had passed a night of nightmares, distracted by having missed her appointment with him the evening before, without a word on his part to warn her before the time or to reassure her after it. But in seeing Croze again, just the same as ever, smiling, perspiring, dressed to kill, his hand outstretched, she drank in new life.

"Beautiful Madame, my respects. Good-morning, good old Corbellier. You rascal! the very latest in pyjamas. . . . What extravagance! But it's quite right. You have those who enjoy it! Fancy ringing me up at seven o'clock in the morning! I thought the Germans were entering Lunéville."

He sat down, swelling like a drum, his limbs spread out; he caressed Emmeline with a glance that seemed

to say to her : "Be calm . . . nothing has changed."
Then—

"So, my children, you've got some worries. As for me, you know what's happening to me?"

"Yes," said Emmeline; "we read about it . . . and we're doubly grateful to you for putting yourself out on our account in spite of it. Your poor sister-in-law must be in a terrible state!"

"Ah, well, dear friend, my sister-in-law is really very self-possessed. They may talk as they like. . . . Religion, when it's genuine, that's a support to one. She is convinced that her husband is dead—drowned or assassinated. She rejects with a kind of irritation any hopes that one tries to suggest to her. She says : 'If Henri were alive, he would have found, during the last forty-eight hours, means of comforting his wife and children.' She has had the whole house dressed in black, and she herself wears mourning; they're having a Mass for the dead this morning at Val d'Anay. And in spite of that she remains firm as a rock, taking the place of the husband who has disappeared and seeing to everything. Religious faith, and then, perhaps also, breed, there's good in all that. . . ."

Since he had been Under-Secretary for War Croze had sensibly diluted the Radical tone of his convictions. Certain journals of the Left accused him of even favouring openly officers belonging to the Opposition.

"Do you really believe in the drowning?" questioned Corbellier.

Croze assumed the air of an augur—

"It's a mystery!"

Emmeline, who always defended, even blindly, conjugal virtue, renewed her protest—

"Never, never shall I admit that a man like Baron Ropart . . . an intelligent man . . . who adored his wife. . . . If the newspapers insinuate that they ought to be suspended and compelled to pay damages, the . . ."

"Be careful, pretty Madame; don't get too excited over my brother-in-law. In the first place, between ourselves, he had not invented panclastite, the good Henri. Oh, a heart of crystal, but not a strong man. . . . The story of the horse, the handkerchief, the hat and the jacket prove that all right."

Confidentially, drawing a little nearer to his listeners, Croze whispered—

"Look here, my children, it doesn't hang together, all that! At the first word I said of it here to the Prefect of police, he pulled me up with: 'Your brother-in-law is at this moment with a woman. . . . Look for the woman.' That's what Lehoux said to me, and that's a fact."

"But what woman?" murmured Corbellier.

"Think hard. . . ."

He laughed, the good fellow, already forgetful of the tragic side of the adventure—the sham widow, the sham orphans, and the scandal in a family so close to his own.

"They used to see at Val-d'Anay a Vicomtesse Brozier, or Broziat, who was rather giddy," Emmeline hazarded, with some severity.

"No, no; much nearer him than that. . . ."

"The governess?"

"You've hit it, Madame. Rosalie Boisset left Val d'Anay eight days ago under the pretence of going to take care of an aunt in the suburbs of Arlon. I telegraphed last night to the Prefect of the Meuse.

The Arlon aunt has no existence. . . . That imbecile of a Henri, to play a trick like that, when all he had to do was to settle his little friend comfortably at Asnières ! ”

The Corbelliers remained stupefied for an instant. Croze continued, with his eyes fastened on the gold hands of the black dial—

“In twenty-four hours it will all be as clear as the sun; and that’s precisely what bothers me, for you may be sure that my name will figure in all the newspapers in reference to this brigand yarn—I, who have nothing at all to do with it, and whose wife has only committed the mistake of having been born a de Sauzon, like Baroness Ropart.”

From the tone in which he said this, it could be clearly divined that he was not so very distressed that this alliance should be divulged.

“But it isn’t to talk about that idiot of a Henri that I have come to see you, eh ? ” he went on. “It appears that you, too, my children, have your incarnate governess ? Only here it is not on the master that she has fixed her choice. Would you have preferred that, my friend ? Maurice bolting abroad with the superb Sandra ? ”

Familiarly, laughing all the time, he gave a little tap to the beautiful bare arm of Emmeline. Corbellier had blushed like a boy at the suggestion that he might have been able to attract the Italian.

“You are wrong to joke,” he stammered ; “it’s very serious. Jacques told his mother, yesterday morning, that he had quite made up his mind to marry Sandra as soon as he is of age.”

“When will he be of age ? ”

“In five months ; that is to say, next December.”

"Good!" said the Deputy. "We have time to turn round. Is she his mistress?"

Maurice blushed again, but made no reply. Emmeline murmured—

"They meet outside the house."

"In that case? Come now?"

"Oh, well, it isn't certain; Jacques is so respectful with women."

"Yes, yes; he was even too much so at one period. It did him harm in society."

"That is the reason," Emmeline went on, "that I was not displeased to see his taste for this Sandra. I was convinced that he ran no risk; you can't imagine how much this boy—that they called an enemy of women—had already lived in feminine intimacies. Madame d'Albany, the Princess of Pamiers and ever so many others would receive him at any hour in their bedrooms, in their dressing-rooms, almost in their baths. . . . One thing only ought to have put me on my guard . . . a new thing . . ."

"What?"

Emmeline replied, not without embarrassment—

"He had given up seeing his friends—Count d'Amblin, young Carl Vorberg . . ."

"Oh," said Croze, "the whole gang."

They were silent, uneasy, in spite of the slackness of their moral principles, about the suspected ground upon which they were obliged to touch. No one of the three, however, dared to say yet what was at the bottom of their thoughts: "What a pity that he gave up seeing the gang!" Yes, that was their unanimous opinion, and they knew well that it was unanimous. They were merely looking for a way of communicating it to each other. But a vague modesty still

restrained them, for no one of the three was thoroughly corrupted. Corbellier even practised a certain resigned stoicism that one might have been able to admire if timidity, the horror of making a decision, had not been its real origin. In fine, all three agreed in that modern bourgeois morality which has for its axis the importance of money, and which consists in respecting the money of another, while defending greedily one's own. The husband and wife, who had become almost strangers to each other in their married life, were sincerely at one in their desire to avert this scandal: a poor foreigner allying herself with their son. And on this point their understanding was so perfect that they had together called in the powerful friend who was full of the same ideas.

No one of the three knew how to arrive at the formula that one could put into words for regretting the overthrow of the "gang." Emmeline dared to say—

"D'Amblin, however, assures me that Jacques is still very amiable with *them* when he meets *them* in society. Only Sandra won't allow him to receive them in the house or to visit them." What an influence she must have gained over him! D'Amblin and Jacques used to be inseparable!"

The family council was silent for a moment. Then Croze, with the air of an advocate who clears up a matter, declared, while the other two listened to him attentively—

"My opinion is that it is not too late to act, to put on the brake. Jacques will not be twenty-one until the end of the year. Besides, from what I know of him, he isn't a boy likely to burn his boats and defy the law of the land and the authority of his parents."

"Oh, that," said Emmeline, "surely not. He told me only yesterday that he wouldn't do that."

"Good! Then the girl is probably much too diplomatic, much too much a person of *combinazione*, to oppose French law and risk being politely conducted to the frontier. The two young turtledoves are, then, at the stage of promises of fidelity . . . Romeo and Juliet . . . 'Barbarous parents oppose our union; but wait for me, and I will wait for you,' eternal constancy, eh? I'm not very far wrong, am I?"

"It is that, exactly," said Emmeline.

Corbellier, who looked up to Croze with a dash of fear and embarrassment before this big man, so blustering and resolute, approved the head of the council.

"Then," continued the Under-Secretary, "proceed along the best-known lines. Out with the Italian this very day—with the fewest possible explanations—liberally paid as far as what she is owed, but nothing more. Don't give the impression of trying your larynx so as to sing, if you are compelled! Watch her going, her leaving the country, understand. (I'll look after that.) One must know all her movements, at least for the first few days. Don't lose sight of Jacques during and after the separation; he is very fond of you, my dear friend. Surround him, admonish him; if need be, enter into his views, tell him that perhaps later on . . . if he is docile . . . if he consents to wait . . . the important thing is that the separation should take place. Believe me, Jacques, from the time that he feels the young person no longer in the house, will begin to detach himself from her. At his age it is the infallible remedy. If I told you

that my father played me the same trick when I was nineteen . . . yes . . . about his stenographer, with whom I was struck. . . . I declared I would kill myself; a week afterwards I had another little comrade. . . . Ah, there it is—diversion! that's the important thing. . . . Once isolated from his Italian, Jacques must not be bored. It is for you to seek, to think out. . . ."

He said no more. Husband and wife had understood.

"Yes," said Emmeline, "we will find him distraction."

"Now, my friends," said Croze, as he rose from his chair, "I must ask your permission to leave you. They are waiting for me at the Army Committee. I have here" (he tapped against his heart where his jacket bulged) "a new plan of mobilization for the fourth arm. When I have had that adopted and carried out, they can mobilize on the other side of the Vosges, and in twelve hours I'll dish their mobilization. Au revoir, Corbellier." (He pressed his hand, while Maurice murmured: "Thanks! thanks! We count greatly on you.") "Au revoir, pretty Madame. . . . No, no, don't disturb yourself; I know the way."

"But I'm going back to my own rooms," Emmeline insisted.

"Well, then . . ."

He effaced himself against the frame of the black door in order to let her pass. Corbellier never thought of being astonished; it was the custom of the house. Croze was especially Emmeline's friend, and when he came to see her she almost always accompanied him as far as the hall, chatting all the time. Corbellier remained thoughtful, standing in front of his writing-

table, absorbed by the anxiety of making this decision: should he go to the works this morning, although it was already past eleven, or should he go only after the midday meal? In the meantime the door had scarcely closed on them when Emmeline impatiently offered her lips to Croze. Just as she had a morbid curiosity for analysing her reflection in mirrors, so she had the same for spying into what there remained to Croze of passion for herself; and this uneasiness made her caresses nervous, tyrannical, more and more intolerable to a man who for a long time, while retaining a sincere friendship for her, looked elsewhere for his pleasure. To-day, stirred by the recollection of the distresses of the evening and the night, she wept as she kissed him. Croze resisted gently these damp kisses, fearing that Corbellier might hear or put in an appearance. He succeeded in disentangling himself, muttering, "Take care! Not here!" and made his escape diagonally across the drawing-room. But she followed him, and caught him up in the back drawing-room. He had to yield to a new impassioned sounding, intensified by: "Say that you love her, your Linette, your little Linette!" Then came the discussion on the next meeting, Croze urging, in order to extricate himself in advance, the exigencies of national defence and the tragedy of Val d'Anay. Emmeline, losing all control of herself, almost cried out: "Then say at once that you don't want to see me any more. . . . Oh, I know well that there is something new in your life . . . there is another woman, a woman that you have not got yet . . . a woman that you are after. . . . I read it in your eyes! . . ." And Croze, amazed, in his turn, at this divination of his discarded mistress, afraid

that she would divine still more, yielded and granted the interview: "The day after to-morrow about three, the same place. . . ." And he was rewarded by another moist embrace, interrupted at last by the noise of the door that was opening from the other side of the drawing-room.

Husband and wife resumed their discussion after the lunch at which, as usual, Louste, Jacques and Sandra had been present, and which had been overweighed by an extreme sense of awkwardness. It was agreed that Emmeline should undertake the dismissal of Sandra, as Maurice was considered, both by her and by himself, incapable of such energetic action. The proceedings of the dismissal were minutely defined: at a little past three, while the Italian would be giving Louste her daily lesson—of which Jacques usually took advantage to leave the house—Maurice and Emmeline would repair together to the schoolroom. Maurice, without unnecessary explanations, would take Louste away with him to his own room, which was next the schoolroom, and would thus be within range to assist his wife if she called him. Maurice did not confess to Emmeline that, from excess of precaution, he had resolved to instal his valet in the dressing-room.

But so energetic and offensive was unnecessary. The scene between the Italian and Madame Corbellier did not last ten minutes, and it was so little like a dispute that Maurice and Louste, although in the next room, did not even catch a raised voice. As soon as the husband and wife had entered the schoolroom, Sandra understood. Without a protest, without a question, she allowed Louste to go off with her father; she waited, standing, for Emmeline's expected an-

nouncement. That lady, in whom the bourgeois instinct for defence, a little maternal jealousy, and the desire to narrate to Croze a really heroic attitude, had infused exceptional firmness, said, well enough, the prepared sentence—

"My dear Mademoiselle Sandra, my husband and I regret that we shall be obliged to part with you."

The governess, only a little paler than usual, asked—

"Why, Madame?"

"You must be able to suspect the reason," answered Emmeline. And, kindling a little, she added: "We have had confidence in you, on the recommendation of Mademoiselle Mag. We treated you at once as a member of the family. By way of recompense, you have . . . you have . . . enticed my son to wish to marry you. . . ."

"Madame," replied Sandra, "Jacques will assure you" (and the mother was shocked at the tranquil way in which she said the "Jacques") "that I have in no way sought to influence him. If he loves me, if I love him, and if he wishes to be my husband, why should I refuse?"

For a moment Emmeline was nonplussed by the precision of this return. She did not like to reply—

"But we know nothing about you, nothing about your family, nothing about your past."

Perceiving vaguely the contradiction between this ignorance and the fact that she had confided her own daughter to this bird of passage, this unknown woman, she found only this to say—

"You are much older than Jacques."

"Oh, Madame, there are only two years between us."

"Well," Emmeline forced herself to say, "since you wish to make me say it, there is . . . a difference of position . . ."

"Difference of money, Madame, for my family is excellent. Jacques knows it; I have hidden nothing from him; he can find out for himself. But it's true that my parents are ruined; I have no *dot*. So you think it right to turn me out of the house because your son wants to marry me. All the same, you know that I have done him nothing but good."

"I don't deny it . . . but you are too intelligent not to understand . . ."

"I understand so clearly that since yesterday, when Jacques told me that he had informed you of his plans, my trunk has been packed. I shall pass the night at the *Grillon*. I have no intention of remaining here against your will, but I warn you openly that neither Jacques nor I will give in. . . ."

Emmeline grew red with anger.

"Don't give in, if that suits you. Jacques is under age, and will do what his parents order him to do."

"Jacques will be of age in five months."

"Oh, from now till then!" said Emmeline.

This was the only moment in which the conversation between the two women raised its tone a little, when they perceived, each behind the eyes of the other, hatred, the longing to tear each other. But the Italian, in order to control herself absolutely, waited a moment with compressed lips. She opened them to say in a very low voice—

"Wish, Madame, that M. Jacques may not break the word that he has given me!"

"I don't understand," said Emmeline uneasily.

Sandra repeated the same words—

"Wish that M. Jacques may not break his word. Wish that, *you* particularly. Adieu, Madame."

She walked towards the door, perfectly calm. Emmeline would have liked to keep her in the room and compel her to explain herself. She stammered out—

"Your month . . . I am paying you your whole month."

"You will send me the money to the *Grillon*, Madame," answered Sandra from the door, and she left the room.

She went away, her heart heavy with rage, her temples beating; her nerves, that had been held tense by pride when she faced Emmeline, now betrayed her. She had to lean against the wall, dazzled by a kind of inner irradiation, a vivid irradiation. So once more it was "outside the door"; once more it was the squalid *home*; it was place after place. . . . And if Jacques, that man-child, did not keep his word, it would be that for the rest of her life. With uncertain steps she went to Jacques' apartment. What had she to be careful about now? She entered without knocking. Jacques, who had just that moment returned, saw by her manner that the scene had taken place, the scene that they had both been expecting since the evening before. He ran to her—

"Well?"

She placed her head on his shoulder and sobbed out—

"Jacques, they are sending me away. . . ."

But immediately she had to support him, for he gave way. She made him sit down, and remained standing close to him, forcing back her tears.

"They are sending me away . . . but I have confidence in you. You won't forsake me, will you?"

And taking his head between her hands, looking at him almost maternally, she said in a low tone, as if she were speaking to herself—

"What can you do, after all? I don't know! . . . What will you do? Will you betray me? . . . No, you won't betray me, but you are capable of offering no resistance! And yet I love you, Jacques, and with me alone you will have a true life. . . . Take care! . . ."

He was about to speak, but she placed her beautiful hand on his mouth.

"Don't say anything. No oaths! As for me, I swear to you that I will never do you any harm. . . . But if you forget me, woe to those who have made you forget."

She freed her friend's lips, and, bending down, she placed on them her own lips in an infinite kiss in which she strove to intoxicate him as with a philtre. Then—

"Stay where you are. Let me go away. It would be too heart-breaking. . . . In a few seconds I shall have left your house. Write to me to-morrow at the *Grillon, Rue des Bergers*."

A whole quarter of an hour elapsed without Jacques finding strength to leave the chair where Sandra had left him. What he experienced was curious. He was overwhelmed with grief, and yet a discreet feeling of deliverance stabbed at the very bottom of his heart. The present seemed to him horrible; he was so used to allowing himself to be controlled in life by Sandra's energy. But the future shone brighter and with an

increasing brightness. Never had his double nature contended in him as in this critical minute; and the contest was genuinely painful to him. If he were compelled to remain alone, overwhelmed as he was, it would be better to die at once.

As he suffered in this way, the swish of a woman's dress made him turn his head. His mother was behind him. She leaned over him and kissed his hair. He was so broken-hearted that this caress did him good. He rose and walked a few steps about the room.

"You are better, darling?" murmured Emmeline.

"I am tired," said Jacques.

And he was shaken by a nervous fit of yawning.

"Listen," said Madame Corbellier, coming nearer. "I disturbed you because one of your friends telephoned just now to ask if he might dine here this evening with us. . . . I thought you were out. . . . I said that I would give the answer as soon as you returned."

"Who is it?"

"Little d'Amblin."

The eyes of mother and son met and then looked away again at once.

"He can come," said Jacques.

CHAPTER IV

B. 2. 17

WHEN Emeline, at the drawing-room door of the Corbelliers', had said to him through her tears: "Oh, I know well that there is something new in your life . . . another woman . . . a woman whom you haven't got yet, a woman whom you are after," Jules Croze had once again been amazed at his mistress' infallible instinct for divining what threatened her. This full-blooded man, led away by the facilities that power gives to the dangerous pleasure of conquests that are quick, brief, changing, was consumed at this moment of crisis by an intense passion. A woman on whom he had for a long time bestowed, without anything more, a covetousness that any swish of skirts coming from youthful limbs aroused in him—a woman who up till now had seemed determined not to notice the clumsy invitations that he launched at her from time to time—for the last few days, without there being the slightest agreement between them, seemed to him somehow or other different. She no longer avoided his glances, but loitered where he was with an air at once anxious, undecided and moved; that air he had known in certain low *comédiennes* when they used formerly to come into his office, and he saw it now in the Rue St. Dominique in certain wives of functionaries, who risked overtures without the knowledge

of their husbands. "Ho, ho!" he thought to himself, "one would almost think she was coming of her own accord!" And as he was one of those men who are peculiarly liable to the temptations of the moment, as this woman lived in his house, inflamed him by her almost continual presence, as he had merely the morality of the greater number of the bourgeois of his day—no moral scandal and no stupidities with money—as, in fine, even his brother-in-law's adventure (drowned in the Cher for his family; in league with Rosalie for the police) roused in his plethoric libertine's head unwholesome desires—every other wish for a conquest was at this moment swept out of his brain. He wanted obstinately the tall, fair girl with the deep eyes, with the tempting mouth, who undertook Jôsette's education. And precisely at this moment Madame Croze was away from home on a fortnight's visit to her sister, whom she was helping at Val d'Anay. Croze, estimating the unhopèd-for facilities that this momentary bachelorhood conferred on him, endeavoured to persuade himself that—in this home without a wife—an adventure with Mag reduced itself to a mere peccadillo.

Now, why did Mag, for a long time indifferent and almost disdainful, seem gradually to become softened and proclaim a coming surrender by the complaisant subtleties of her eyes, her gestures, her voice, which do not deceive the experienced libertine? Croze had gained too much knowledge in five years of executive power to think like a schoolboy: "She is beginning to love me." He said: "She wants to make use of me. She wants money, perhaps." In the house she had the reputation of a miser, never failing to demand to the minute her monthly pay. Well, Croze

had a hand easily opened; he would sacrifice a good fifty louis to this passing fancy, "but not one more; and as a gift, a gift." But more probably it was not in money, but in influence, that the young foreigner wished to be paid for her complacency. Croze remembered that she had one day asked about the regulations for entering Government schools. "That's the point," he thought. "She sees Josette at the age for marrying at any moment, and she has no wish to 'take another situation.' She wants her liberty. . . . So be it! We must hunt up from five to six thousand francs out of the Budget, and it will be rendering a service to the Republic, for this Mag has a superior intelligence."

It was in this state of mind that Jules Croze commenced that 23rd of June, which was to be for him one of those fateful days when Destiny, usually indistinct, crouching in the darkness, seems suddenly to take a spring, and leap upon a house, a family, a man. When his valet woke him up at half-past seven, his first coherent thought was not about the speech he was going to make that very day at the House, the speech that should gain the vote for the supplementary estimates for aviation; his first thought was of Mag, and he evoked a brief scene that had taken place the previous evening.* He had met the German by accident in the corridor on the first floor; instead of effacing herself with an affectation of deference as she used to do, she had stopped at the same time as he. He had read the smile in her eyes that she did not conceal; then, with his methods of a Don Juan of the minute who knows that deeds are more discreet and less dilatory than words, he seized her wrists and groped for her lips. She had averted them cleverly

without fright, but had allowed him to kiss her hair. For a moment the mouth of the Under-Secretary had been buried in the rich blonde mass. It smelt of honey, and right against her ear he had stammered out: "In my room, a little later after dinner, now when Madame is away, nobody will suspect." She laughed; then, disengaging herself, passed on, and said from a little distance: "With Josette in the house. . . . Never." And she had gone on that word, leaving the man overcome with surprise and hope.

Immediately, with the ingenious practical activity that he threw into all his enterprises, he had imagined and contrived the absence of Josette, which was the sole condition for Mag's consent. At an ordinary time nothing would have been easier—a box at a subsidized theatre, Guy escorting Josette and the little ones of the Rue Palatine, as had happened twenty times before. But it was precisely now that Guy, Josette and the three little ones of the Rue Palatine could not show themselves at the play: Guy and Josette on account of the supposed death of their Uncle Ropart; Yvonne, Alice and Nanie on account of Haumont-Segré's bankruptcy, a bankruptcy saved from the appearance of fraud by the influence of the Government, but which none the less weighed sadly on the family, besides endangering the life of Madame Haumont-Segré, who, since the catastrophe, had been attacked by fits of cardiac choking. Alone in his room after his meeting with Mag, the Under-Secretary, while giving the final touches to the speech that he was going to make in the Chamber on the following day, exerted himself to find a means of getting Josette out of the house at least for one evening. "When this artful German has once given in here," he

thought, "if I think that she's worth the trouble, she must allow herself to be met outside the house. . . . But for this first time, since she has scruples (and, as a matter of fact, she is right), what is to be done? I see. . . . Since Haumont-Segré's crash I have ordered Guy to give up visiting the Rue Palatine. But now that everything is arranged . . . Haumont-Segré will not be troubled; the respectability of his brother has not been touched by the smash. Yvonne has no *dot*, but she adores Guy, and she will be an excellent companion for this laboratory rat; a marriage into the higher university circles will be of use to him. I have already gone against Josette's inclinations, and we mustn't abuse paternal authority. . . . I'm going to tell Josette to go with her brother to dine to-morrow at the Rue Palatine. She will ask nothing better." Thus was decided the destiny of Guy and Yvonne. And far from experiencing the slightest remorse, Croze, while putting together this odd structure of intrigue, conceived a kind of moral compensation between his selfish pleasure and the consent that he was giving to the happiness of others.

Waking up on the 23rd of June, the Under-Secretary of State for War was pleased with the prospects of his day. It presented itself sunlit, but without excessive heat, it had rained so much during the preceding week! The speech on aviation, type-written during the night by his secretaries, was lying on the little table near his bed beside his boiled egg, toast and bottle of mineral water. Sentences of this speech rang in the author's memory: "The war bird must have its nest strongly built and well protected, quite close to the barrier over which it is to fly on the day of peril." And again: "Think of the

despair of those who formerly, for having wished to spare France an expenditure of two hundred millions, have been forced to put their signatures to the Act which impoverished her by five thousand millions." He repeated to himself these sonorous sentences; he was pleased with them; he was proud to think that they would bring, in spite of the opposition of the Socialists, the vote for the enormous credit that he demanded to secure the plan of aerial mobilization of which he was the principal designer, the plan to which he had given—among so many sensual caprices, and without ever neglecting his own interests, whether of money or of ambition—a genuine effort, a sincere wish to serve his country. For this big, full-blooded voluptuary had sound and valuable qualities: he was honest and patriotic; he exerted himself ungrudgingly to fulfil his mission and his official duties, as he did to secure the material well-being, the "position" of his wife and his children. He was hard-working and serviceable. He lacked, like so many bourgeois of every country in the modern world, only that moral education, that faith in the ideal, which consolidates, amalgamates, animates a man's natural gifts and makes them virtues.

The morning was passed in correcting and mastering the speech, and in examining the papers that bore upon it, particularly the B. 2. 17—a plan for aerial mobilization between Verdun and Nancy, on which the greater part of the proposed modifications depended. He did not go to the Ministry; on days when there was an important debate it was necessary for him to avoid wear and tear—that office door, opened and closed ceaselessly by the head of the secretary's office, the interruptions of politicians, the

torment of the telephone. In his own house, in his large office, opening out on to the verdure of the Parc Monceau, near his bedroom and his bathroom, he was able to work half dressed—that was to his taste—and from time to time, when his head was congested under the effort, he would refresh it with a shower-bath. To-day, however, contrary to his custom on mornings of hard work, he came down to lunch at the family table. Josette and Guy were surprised to see him arrive punctually, carefully shaved, and dressed with all the scrupulousness of which he was capable. It was because work had not hindered him from brooding over his other design; on the contrary—he confessed it to a few intimate friends—he worked better, with more speed and intensity, when salacious images floated through his brain, and when, between two efforts of composition or comprehension, he would roll his thoughts in them; he compared this to the effect of the shower-bath on his head. . . . At table, seated opposite Josette between Guy and Mag, he was in very good humour. Guy showed a letter received from Val d'Anay, a letter from his mother. Madame Croze was inexhaustible in praising the energy of her sister, who, with dry eyes, was wearing herself out in getting in order everything that the Baron's disappearance had left in abeyance. But in the country rumours began to circulate, the same that Croze had gathered in Paris from the Prefect Lehoux: there were covert smiles; the hypothesis of the trick was discussed. Madame Croze, supporting the contagious faith of her sister, protested indignantly. Croze gave his opinion freely before the governess and children; then all of a sudden, changing the subject, he said—

“Tell me, Josette; it's a long time, it seems to me,

since you dined at the Rue Palatine, your brother and you?"

He enjoyed the surprise of the brother and sister, and then went on quietly—

"It was wise to wait until the noise about the Haumont-Segré's smash had settled down. But there's a limit to everything. Telephone to that good mother Haumont-Manin, and invite yourselves to her house. She won't find you in the way, believe me. Good heavens! we all have our family troubles. Let us be generous, we who are luckier than others."

It was not the custom in this house to discuss what Croze willed. When he had said to his son a fortnight before: "Let me think, and see how things turn out. I will do everything possible for old Haumont to be spared prosecution, but I insist, in the meantime, on your not frequenting the Rue Palatine," Guy had replied: "Father, I will obey you, but at the same time I am writing to Yvonne to tell her that nothing has been changed in my plans." And Croze had sneered; he misunderstood his son, just as he did his daughter as well, and gave this generation, so different from himself, credit for the same grossly practical instincts as his own. The apparent submission of Josette (who at this very moment was living the dream of Romeo and Juliet, while her father believed her finally separated from Letzling) encouraged him to think: "Children's calf-love. . . . A little firmness . . . time passes . . . and that doesn't last."

Guy, who took after his mother rather than his father, judged the latter with a certain perspicuity, but he knew him to be good; he admired his keen business perception, his industry; he called his

sonorous abundance of words talent. Disconcerted at first, when he grasped that his admired and feared father was consenting to his marriage with Yvonne he perceived in this consent only fatherly kindness, a prudent kindness which had been reserved while there was doubt, but which was eager to act the moment it could. He left his place and went up to his father to embrace him. Josette, returning to actuality, burst into tears. Croze took her by the hand.

"Come, my little girl,* one mustn't be in the dumps. Be sure that everything will arrange itself in the end."

In saying this he went beyond his real thoughts, for nothing would have made him anticipate a marriage between Josette and Letzling as possible. All that he counted on was Letzling being transferred to another post and Josette forgetting all about him. But to-day he was in a good humour; he wanted smiling faces around him. Josette having regained her self-possession, he exchanged with Mag an affectionate glance, and the luncheon finished in a tender gaiety after the fashion of Jean-Jacques.

"Then, papa, it will be time enough if we are at the Chamber towards half-past three?" asked Josette at the moment when the Under-Secretary of State was slipping into his Night overcoat in the large hall in the presence of his children and Mag.

"Half-past three . . . four o'clock, even. Five speakers are down before me, but I am told that Dubuc of the Coalition is very ill. Au revoir, young people; au revoir, Mademoiselle. . . ."

A glance again at the German, an affectionate wave to the children, and, preceded by a footman, he went down the steps of his house, and his round back was

swallowed up in the throbbing motor as he set off to the field of battle—his courage and hope doubled by this certainty of a fresh conquest which had fallen suddenly into his life under unforeseen conditions of quietude and security. Without even finding himself a little odious or comic, he said to himself—

“She is very proper, this Mag. . . . And I am grateful to her for only wishing to respond while Julie and Josette are away.”

All the same he had not been able to arrange this nocturnal appointment with the German, as he had seen her to-day only in the presence of the children.

“Bah!” he thought, “she is cunning! . . . She understood. She will arrange to join me at the right time.”

There are men, a great many even, with whom sensuality remains a long time keen enough to clothe itself, at each new incarnation of their fickle desires, with almost the appearance of the newest, sincerest, most ardent passion. Any one who had observed Jules Croze this same Saturday towards half-past nine in the evening, alone in his rooms—having sent away, under the plausible pretext of fatigue, his secretary and his valet, saying to them, for the sake of greater security: “I must be allowed to sleep to-morrow, even if it’s to the middle of the day. There must be no telegrams, no telephone calls. It will be Sunday; say that I am in the country”; any one who had seen Croze striding up and down his rooms from the end of the bathroom to the door of the private ante-room, trying to read, trying to regain his interest in the piles of papers scattered on the table, looking at his clock, leaning his forehead against the window-panes to look

at the Parc Monceau, steeped in a shadow that the lights were dotting; any one looking at him would have admired (or ridiculed) this feverish waiting, this panting emotion, as of one who is making his *début* in conquests. More than half-an-hour went by in this way; silence weighed on the house.

"Decidedly," thought Croze, "I was wrong not to arrange precisely. This girl may not dare to come up here. However, she knows that there is not the slightest danger. Julie is away, and the floor above is uninhabited; on this one there is nobody but myself. Come, come, I must not wear myself out. Her eyes said to me twice: 'It's understood,' as clearly as if she had said the words. Yes, but just now, at the Chamber, she didn't accompany Josette and Guy. She pleaded a headache. All the same, it might have been true! If she were ill? Ah, those d——d women! . . ."

His thoughts stumbled on this double question: "Is she ill or not? Will she come or not?" He forgot his parliamentary triumph of the day, Right and Left uniting in congratulations, the Socialists reduced to mumbling vague excuses for abstaining—a majority of four hundred for the Government. Contrary to his habit of enjoying systematically, he did not linger over the process of revelling in the aftertaste of his success—recalling the handshakes of friends, the glances, more flattering still, of the envious ones, now foiled and subdued, the affectionate embraces of Josette and Guy when it was all over, and the bulletin of victory telegraphed from the field of battle: "Madame Croze, Château of Val d'Anay, near Romorantin. My dear one, unlooked-for success, formidable majority, best love," and finally, the

restful drive back, alone in his car, through the most deserted by-ways of the Bois, so as to reach the house after Josette and Guy had left to go and dine with the Haumont-Manins, a unique manifestation, under the circumstances, of his paternal modesty.

"Those damned women!" he repeated in an undertone. "Five minutes to ten. She won't come. She shall pay for it."

He took up his papers again, trying to distract his nervousness by work; he turned over the leaves of B. 2. 17. Dubuc, of the Coalition, restored to health in the nick of time for the debate, had just now hurled two objections at him, from which he had extricated himself only by oratorical amplifications. He was reading again the figures on which his memory had failed him, when a rustling in the silence made him tremble. He pricked up his ears. There could be no doubt about it; some one was behind the office door in the private ante-room. He threw down quickly the pile of papers into the half-open drawer of his writing-table, and ran to the door. With his hand on the knob of the lock, he felt the aid of another hand which was opening at the same time. Through the half-opening Mag entered. As he drew the inner bolt he stammered out: "At last, at last!" and at once he wished to seize the young woman in his arms. She still screened her lips from him, but she allowed him to inhale, longer than on the evening before, the honey-like perfume of her temples and her hair.

"Be careful!" she said at last. "Let us talk for a little."

She took a seat in the leather arm-chair, intended for visitors, to the right of the writing-table. She glanced at everything round her with a quiet and

attentive eye. He, with the cumbersome grace of a corpulent man who is out of breath, wanted to go down on his knees before her.

"No, no," she said; "sit in your place."

He obeyed her. She seemed amused at his emotion. At each new conquest Croze became again trembling and fervent as a schoolboy, free to take his revenge an hour afterwards for this carelessness that verged on impertinence. All the nonsense that women are condemned to listen to under such circumstances he repeated to Mag, not without sincerity: that he admired her; that he had longed for her; that she had really made him suffer; that the other adventures, since she had come to the house, had been for him only attempts at forgetfulness; that to-day, in the moment of his success, he had thought only of her. But, as a matter of fact, why had she not come to the great sitting?

"I was really a little tired," replied the German. "And besides, I wanted to see no one . . . no one. . . . I haven't stirred from my room all the afternoon."

Croze wished to understand in this sentence a decorous way of confessing her agitation at the meeting, a little shame mingled with consent. He rose, approached the young woman, and, leaning against the slope at the back of her arm-chair, he began to kiss her temples, her cheeks, her neck. She made no more resistance. His voluptuary's heart grew warm and sent him hurried beatings. At the same time a sudden thought flashed through his brain: "Why is she here? Why this evening, and never before?" Lucid for a moment, he realised the utter ignorance in which he still was in regard to this foreigner, who

had lived for many years under his roof, at his table, and to whom he had confided his daughter. But the imperious demands of his senses urged him on. He swept out of his thoughts, by an act of will-power, what might have made him hesitate before profiting by this passionate moment—by these eyes, submissive to the master; by this mouth, which was half open; by all this femininity, mysterious and consenting. . . .

As Croze had given orders, he was not called the following morning. It was a barrel-organ, grinding out a low song, in the avenue of the Park, scarcely half-an-hour before midday, which first chased away the fumes of sleep. They cleared slowly, progressively, and through them the realities of the evening before made their appearance: Dubuc putting questions to him from his place, the applause of the Chamber . . . a path in the Bois . . . then in the semi-darkness of his room a feminine form coming through the door and approaching him, a pair of dead white arms, a pair of shoulders, well developed and firm, a cascade over his eyes of loosened hair that savoured of honey, while two clear eyes gazed into his from quite near. In order to recall these memories precisely, he forced himself to wake up completely. He took care not to ring for his valet, so as not to be disturbed in his retrospective delight.

"Ah, the rascal, the rascal!" he thought; "with that quiet air, who would have believed it? But it's all the same: her place is no longer in my house beside Josette. The first thing to-morrow I'll see my colleague of Public Instruction. . . . And on my side I will guarantee her the means for establishing herself comfortably. . . ."

He jumped down from his bed and went himself to draw the window-curtains. The Park, in its Sunday springtide, smiled from its thickets and groves; along the paths families were going to Mass or coming from it, the parents in black, the children with their bare calves and with sailor collars, little girls in princess dresses, with flowers in their hats, their thin legs projecting from their short skirts. Croze thought of his wife: "Poor dear! Supposing I were to go and surprise her at Val d'Anay?" He would have done it gladly, for Madame Croze's absence was beginning to seem long to him, and he felt the loss of those good bourgeois Sundays when, one beside the other, she and he would go for a motor-drive as far as Villebon or Versailles. . . . "But the mourning regulations down there are really too fearful . . . I couldn't put up with them; I should burst out. . . . I should shout out loud to my sister-in-law: 'Your loose fish of a husband is as much alive as you or I.'" And he laughed, tapping the window-pane to the rhythm of the barrel-organ, that had taken up the air again further off.

Suddenly he did not stir any more. Then just as he was, with his feet bare and in his night-shirt, he ran into his study. The windows, with the blinds up, poured in the full daylight there. He gave a sigh of relief on perceiving the key still hanging in the drawer of the writing-table. "That's all right," he thought. "I should at least have drawn the bolt of the door. . . . Mag has only had to draw the door after her without closing it." He went to pull this bolt mechanically, and then returned, still in his night-shirt, to sit down in his chair for work. He tied up the packets of papers which remained on the writing-

table. That of B. 12. 17 was not among them. . . . "That's right," he thought; "I placed it in the drawer when I heard Mag behind the door." He opened the drawer thoroughly, in order to verify . . .

A cold shiver suddenly attacked him, first in the heels, then in the legs, then in the stomach, then in all the limbs, until his hands, contracted and rigid, refused to grope in the papers that they could no longer grasp. "Come, come," he said at last; "I'm dreaming, I'm mad." He curbed his emotion with a violent effort, drank in the fresh air in great draughts, began his search again, at first methodically, then, in spite of himself, more feverishly, with the exasperated awkwardness of a child that is at once impatient and ill-tempered. . . . And while he stirred the papers, many of which fluttered on to the ground, there escaped from his throat interjections that resembled groanings, sobs.

He stopped. He leaned his two hands against the ledge of the writing-table. He thought: "It is clear . . . it is clear." During an interval of a few seconds he faced every possibility of the future—even a spring out of the window, or a revolver-shot in the temples. He recalled a phrase of Guy's one day at the family dinner-table: "Here is the easiest way to leave this vale of tears: swallow a good dose of chloral, turn on the gas, and lie down. One passes insensibly from sleep to death." But a protest of vivacious egotism roused him: "As for that, there will be time enough . . . and besides, I am perhaps mistaken, even now."

He rang for his valet. The man smiled as he came into the room—

"Monsieur must have had a good night's sleep. . . ."

He interrupted him—

"Call Mademoiselle Mag."

Astonished, the valet said: "Certainly, Monsieur," and obeyed. When he returned his master had put on a dressing-gown.

"Well?"

"Mademoiselle Mag went out very early, towards seven o'clock; she told the concierge that she was going to the swimming-bath. . . . She goes there once a week just at this time."

Croze could scarcely wait for the reply; again he felt the cold mounting from his heels to his heart.

"Had she a parcel with her?"

"Yes, a little bag, in which she carries her costume, just as usual. But Monsieur is ill?"

The Under-Secretary threw himself over the back of the arm-chair; he had become suddenly crimson, and his fingers struggled with the collar of his night-shirt. The valet rushed up to him and tore off the button.

"Monsieur does not feel well. . . ."

"That's . . . that's better," replied Croze in a weak voice. "I tell you that's better. Leave me alone. Wait . . . take the telephone on my table . . . yes . . . sit in my place."

He was exhausting all the force left to him in these panting orders. His voice was scarcely intelligible when he directed—

"Ask for 403.22 . . . the Prefect of Police. From the Under-Secretary of War. . . . An inspector at once, here. . . . And then . . . no, no! don't telephone; I tell you not to telephone . . . name of a . . . We have the whole day. Not a word . . . to any one . . . not a word. Do you hear?"

And while the valet, terror-stricken, hung up the receiver, Croze pressed his two hands against his forehead, whence it seemed to him that under the frightful internal pressure blood was going to pierce through the skin.

BOOK • IV.

•
FANNY

CHAPTER I

THE BILL

AFTER a few seconds passed in an apple-green waiting-room, seconds that Croze spent in re-reading a note from Emmeline and in glancing at an engraving hung on the wall, "The Port of Bordeaux in the 17th Century," the door opened, and the usher of the Prefect of Police said, as he made way for him—

"If Monsieur the Under-Secretary of State will be so kind as to give himself the trouble . . ."

At the entrance of Croze, the Prefect Lehoux, whose thin and mobile face, with its goat's beard, so well known in Paris, recalled the Light Infantry of the second Empire, rose from his desk and held out his hand.

"Good-morning, my dear Minister."

"Good-morning, my dear Prefect."

Croze's face betrayed an expression that was at once anxious and sheepish; he detected irony beneath the thin mask and the piercing eyes of the Prefect.

"Well?" questioned Croze, seeing that Lehoux remained silent.

"Well, it is a great pity that you did not yield to your first impulse, and that you waited until Monday to give me information."

"Obviously," murmured Croze. "But you understand, don't you? The police in the business, there's publicity . . . there's the alarm sounded in the Press . . ."

"No, no; we are very discreet. If you had advised us on Sunday at midday, my inspector, Mercadieux, would have caught Mademoiselle Magda Riemann at Jeumont on the four-eight train in which she passed the frontier. She had in the luggage van a trunk of ordinary size which was opened at the Customs, and appeared to contain nothing suspicious. A Customs officer states that he noticed packages of papers in the bag she was carrying in her hand. At Brussels, where she arrived at five o'clock, we lost sight of her. She had left her trunk in the cloak-room and had gone for a walk in the town with her bag; it's impossible to find the commissioner who carried it for her, and so he must have been an accomplice. We see our fugitive again the same evening at Ostend, where with her trunk and her bag she embarks quietly for England. She is at this moment in London with a friend, a German and a governess like herself, Florenz Barr, 3, King Street (St. James'). Mercadieux, who returned this morning, saw her as I see you."

"He saw her and didn't have her arrested?"

Lehoux made a gesture of protest in which mockery and pity were blended.

"The English law?" said Croze.

"Naturally, my dear Minister. We are not in our own house at 3, King Street, St. James', and I see no way of . . ."

"All the same," persisted Croze, "this girl has robbed . . . Papers on mobilization or title-deeds, what difference is there between them? She has taken papers which do not belong to her."

Instead of replying, the Prefect leaned towards him and said in a low tone—

"Are you anxious to see, re-opening at your expense,

a certain affair which made a great deal of stir in the first year of this century? You may be sure that your governess is only an instrument in a hand that is dangerous."

"What hand?" asked Croze, who in all sincerity did not understand.

Lehoux seemed to hesitate a moment and to select in his head what he was willing and what he was unwilling to say.

"The inquiry in Paris very soon showed us that Mademoiselle Mag Riemann was the mistress of M. Bolski."

"The pianist?"

"Yes, the pianist from Koenigsberg, who is received in the best society of Paris."

"But Bolski earns money," said Croze, divining the Prefect's idea, and passing over useless rejoinders.

"He earns twenty thousand francs a year, we are told. But as he happens to lose more than that in a gambling den in one single evening . . ."

"Then it must be he?"

Still closer, and in a yet lower voice, Lehoux whispered almost into the very ear of Croze—

"Bolski is an old fellow-student at the University and an intimate friend of Count Letzling, the Austrian military attaché."

"Oh," exclaimed Croze, "Letzling is incapable . . ."

"Will you tell me why? He did not soil his hands with the theft of the documents, not he. Very probably it is not from him that the idea originated. His needy comrade will have proposed the thing to him already planned, and as he, the Count, had no reason to spare you, since you refused your daughter to him without ceremony . . ."

"Never shall I believe such an infamy of M. de Letzling. . . . The man whom I received in my own house! . . ."

"You received him, but afterwards you showed him the door. He has got even with you, or rather he is very pleased to make you pay for his disappointment. And besides, he serves his country, this fellow. He performs his duty as military attaché."

"No, no," protested Croze, "your information deceives you. Bolski as much as you like, not Letzling."

"Will you explain to me, then, why Count Adolf von Letzling left Paris abruptly on Monday evening, the day before yesterday—the same day on which you gave me your information—and why his first visit at Vienna, without even taking the time to change his clothes, was to the Minister of War, who is, moreover, his uncle?"

The Under-Secretary of State made no reply. . . . He experienced the sensation of sinking in sand; the sand caught him, his feet first, then his ankles, then it mounted towards his knees. He muttered—

"If it is really Letzling . . . perhaps, through the intervention of Josette . . . one might be able . . ."

"Don't mix your daughter up in all this. Take my advice," replied the Prefect dryly.

Later on Croze was to recall the abruptness of this answer, and also the fact that the Prefect had suddenly stopped looking at him and had begun to play with his paper-knife.

"Then . . ." he muttered piteously. . . .

"Then" (and the piercing glance of the Prefect penetrated once more into the eyes of the patient) "there are two solutions: an official request to the

English Government, arrest, if his Majesty's Government countenances it, and naturally an uproar in the Press throughout the whole world . . . with its reverberation on your position and on your household. For, after all, it will have to be told how Mademoiselle Riemann was introduced in the middle of the night into your private room. She will speak, Mademoiselle Riemann will . . ."

Croze hung his head.

"The other solution," Lehoux went on, "is the better solution, if it is not too late: if the documents are, as I believe they are, still in the hands of the wench and her lover. . . . If one paid them a better price than a Government would pay them—I don't suppose they would make it a matter of patriotism."

"But how much, then, should one pay them?"

"As for that, I don't know. I have an idea that one should not haggle over it."

Croze let his hands fall between his legs, and leaning forward, muttered—

"Ah! the jade!"

The Prefect, who was still playing with his paper-knife, assumed a tone of indulgent scolding, tempered with irony—

"Evidently, my poor Minister, this is overwhelming for you, but . . . you will pardon me for saying this: to what an odd caprice you yielded! How could you . . . you who have a charming wife . . . and with that, well-known friendships and more opportunities than you can wish for in a society at once brilliant and approachable . . . you wanted, in addition to all this, a sort of German maid! Heavens! It was the governess of your daughter!"

Deep down Croze was sending the Prefect to the

devil. "This little ossified person," he thought, "doesn't seem to grasp that one receives strokes of passion like sunstroke without looking for them. . . . To think that there are men like that!" He envied and at the same time despised him.

"Many others beside myself," he stammered out, "have had a similar lapse of imprudence, and no harm has come to them from it."

"It's true; I often make that reflection. There are people who pass their lives in risking the worst scandals, and everything rights itself for them. Others commit one single imprudence, and the whole of their life is upset. Good luck and bad. And then, you see, there are some people, particularly, who know how to make use of money."

"But I was quite willing to give money to that girl," cried Croze. . . . "You may be very sure that I wasn't going to accept her favours gratuitously. I was waiting to have a talk with her. . . . I even let her understand that."

"That was precisely your mistake," replied the Prefect, with a smile. "One ought never to put off giving money to women. Distrust those who don't ask for it, as they all want it—all, understand. Those who don't ask for it are the most dangerous and the most expensive. And the knowing ones are those who give it to them *before*, provisionally, by way of insurance. If you had given Mademoiselle Riemann ten thousand francs on Saturday night, B. 2. 17 would probably be at this moment in your drawer. . . . You make a grimace, and you think that Mademoiselle Riemann was not worth ten thousand francs? The bill, in the end, will be for very much more, believe me, to say nothing of the worry."

The door which communicated between the Prefect's room and the neighboring office opened, and a man of forty, with an intelligent but common face, thick black hair, a black moustache, a horseshoe beard, and the general appearance of a first-mate in a frock-coat, appeared in the doorway and immediately apologized—

"I beg your pardon, M. le Préfet, I thought you were alone."

"Come in, come in, Mercadieux," said the Prefect. "Here is the Under-Secretary of State himself with whose case you have just been busy."

The head inspector bowed to Croze, who held out his hand and asked anxiously—

"Anything fresh?"

"Nothing, M. le Ministre, we shall not hear anything before to-night, the girl Riemann is still holding back the papers. The inspector that I left in London should telegraph to me . . ."

"Then," questioned the Prefect, "what did you want to speak to me about, Mercadieux?"

Hesitating for a moment, and then making up his mind, Mercadieux replied—

"It was about the Val d'Anay business."

"Oh, well, but you can speak before the Under-Secretary of State, for he is Baron Ropart's brother-in-law."

"Ah, yes," said Mercadieux.

And bowing again as if he were congratulating Croze on this convergence of adventures—

"The Baron Ropart," he said, "has certainly stayed in Paris from the day following his pretended suicide, until Saturday last, with the girl Boisset. They lived in some quite nicely appointed furnished

apartments near the Place d'Italie, under the name of M. and Mme. Baugis; Baugis is the name of a farm belonging to the Baron. Rosalie Boisset was installed in this house for more than a week; she was waiting, she said, for her husband who was returning from abroad. They took tickets for Brazil under the name of Colin from an agency in the Rue Scribe. And they embarked the day before yesterday on the *São-Paulo* for Rio. There is no doubt as to their identity. The girl Boisset appears to be enceinte."

"My dear Minister," said Lehoux to Croze, "will you undertake to communicate this information to your sister-in-law?"

"My word, no!" said Croze. "My sister-in-law sticks to her view. She won't hear of any trick. . . . The Baron, she says, was incapable of proving false to his duties as a husband."

"Your sister-in-law is a woman of admirable dignity," Lehoux corrected. "Did you notice how quickly silence was established in the Press over this sad affair? Your sister-in-law, at all events, knows how to make use of money. But since you avoid it yourself, Mercadieux will go to Val d'Anay, for a definite end must be made of our inquiry. . . . Do you know," he added, relaxing the severity of his mask (he had spoken the last sentences rather harshly), "do you know, my dear Minister, that it will soon be necessary to establish at the prefecture a special office for looking into the affairs of foreign governesses? I have the Val d'Anay matter; I have your affair; I have a complaint from poor Haumont-Segré, now retired to Bois-Colombes with his dying wife, who accuses a certain Fanny Smith

of having estranged his daughter, Mademoiselle Berthe Haumont-Segré, who is under age. The Englishwoman has carried off her pupil, and she has assumed such control over her that in spite of supplications the young girl, who knows the state of her mother's health, refuses to see her."

"The fact is," grunted Croze, "they're an abominable breed."

"They are dangerous only through your fault. Not through your fault personally, Croze, through the fault of people of your social position and of your standard of wealth."

The Prefect did not disdain to philosophize on the point. Leaning back in his arm-chair, he went on—

"Think for a minute! A girl of from eighteen to twenty, a girl of a certain culture, a certain education, leaves her family and her country to come and earn her bread in Paris: it is abnormal. Yes, it's abnormal, because expatriation at that age is full of danger for her, and because any honourable family would only decide upon it at the last extremity. Out of ten cases, there will be only one in which honourable parents will have deliberately sent their prudent and courageous daughter abroad, and nine other cases in which the daughter will have left her parents out of desperation, it may be because her home had become insupportable (remarriage of the father, misconduct of the mother, scandal); it may be that she has been attracted by a love intrigue. And in these nine last cases the young lady will heap up mystifications and lies, so that no one may be able to trace her back to her family: false names, false place of birth, false certificates. Foreigners are compelled to declare

their identity? But how many mothers or fathers of a family, when engaging a governess, take the trouble to verify the statements of the foreigner? And that is why I tell you that you are the culprits, you, the rich bourgeois, you the people in society. That category of girls in which, certainly, there are types that are absolutely correct, but in which the majority being, by their very functions, severed from their social and family circle, do not share any longer in the morale of *their* family, *their* circle; this category of girls is, moreover, the very one on which it is most difficult to have precise and truthful information, and you others, you make your choice with utter carelessness. . . ."

"Oh," protested Croze.

"There is no 'Oh' which is worth anything. If the foreigner's appearance pleases you, if the first onset is favourable, and particularly, if you begin to get impatient over your investigations, you avoid accepting information for fear of its inducing you to make fresh inquiries. And when you have made your choice with this carelessness, in a milieu that is essentially open to suspicion and almost impossible to control, what do you confide to the person thus chosen? Precisely your most precious and fragile possession—your daughter. Frankly, when afterwards you have to settle a bill that is a little heavy, you have only yourself to blame . . . especially if you have shown a certain personal imprudence—as you have, my dear Minister," the Prefect finished, tapping Croze's knee with a friendly laugh.

Croze had listened to this harangue with his head rather low.

"I don't deny it," he replied; "but you, the police,

isn't that what you are there for, to supervise suspected foreigners, give us information about them, and defend us from them, if need be?"

"Impossible, my dear Minister. My means of investigation end at the frontier, and if they didn't, the whole of my staff would be insufficient."

"Besides," insinuated Mercadieux in a discreet voice, and with a respectful glance at the Under-Secretary, "the certificates, the gratuitous references furnished by French families in regard to these young girls, confuse everything. And then, there is an understanding between them; they exchange proofs of identity, 'testimonials.' It is inextricable."

"Then," said Croze, rising to his feet, "our children must give up learning foreign languages?"

"The evil of that would not be enormous," said the Prefect, rising in his turn. "What foreign language do you speak?"

"None, but . . ."

"Nor I, either. All the same we have got along, you and I, and Mercadieux has in his office, at a hundred francs a month, a stenographer who speaks with equal facility English, German and French."

Mercadieux bowed and withdrew. Lehoux accompanied Croze to the office door.

"Besides," he went on, "nothing hinders you from letting these foreign young ladies come to your houses for an hour or two a day like professors; but, believe me, it is better not to let them live in your own houses, listening to your conversations, watching your visitors, investigating your correspondence, and particularly avoid them as guardian angels to your daughters."

Croze in the doorway protested: "My brother-in-

law might have gone away with a young person from Romorantin or Montargis."

"Possibly. It seems that she was perfectly straight, like him for that matter. . . . But love in the New World, expatriation . . . Rio . . . that's an idea of a foreigner just the same. A girl from Romorantin or Montargis would have proposed Paris quite simply. And then at Montargis, at Romorantin, relations would have been found, people of the country who would have been willing to use their influence with the fugitive. Past the frontier, even the Belgian frontier, the difficulties are doubled. To fill the place of Mademoiselle Riemann engage a French girl, if you take my advice."

Lowering his voice, he added—

"Are there in your house and in your circle any suspicions as to the real cause of this Riemann's departure?"

"My wife is at Val d'Anay, and I have not allowed her to be told about it. As for my children, I'm afraid they suspect, at all events my son Guy does. In any case, so long as it doesn't get into the newspapers . . . and so long as that animal of a Berger, the reporter of the Commission, who dislikes me, doesn't get wind of the matter and ask me for the document. . . ."

The two men shook hands. Croze went slowly down the staircase, pondering over the Prefect's words, which had, in short, humiliated and irritated him. "I have need of him for the moment," he thought; "but if ever I have the portfolio of the Interior, won't I just send him into retirement to meditate on the condition of governesses!"

The car with the chauffeur wearing a tricolor

cockade, was waiting for him in the Boulevard du Palais. Croze said, "To the Chamber, quick!" As he rolled along the quays he read once more the note from Emmeline which he had received that very morning: "I beg of you to let me see you to-morrow morning and not in my house." He thought: "Is it going to be another worry? They generally come in a series." But what 'worry' could he anticipate from the amorous Emmeline, except jeremiads on the infrequencies of their interviews, a scene of jealousy ending in protestations of eternal affection? All that was scarcely of any importance. And so he had complied with Emmeline's wish, and had sent her these words by way of reply: "At the Chamber about 11." To tell the truth, Croze, even at the price of a scene of jealousy, was not sorry to see his old friend that morning. Verbose, sociable, given to confidences, it was painful for him to carry alone the weight of this enormous secret. Unable to communicate it to his wife or children, he wished to share it with Emmeline. . . . "Really good deep down, the dear thing. In regard to everything that concerns my career she has always given me good advice, and yet she isn't extremely intelligent. . . . But a woman who loves you, she has something like second sight. . . . Yes, I'm going to consult her." (He had told her about the theft of the document, but without explaining the means by which Mag had operated.) "I'll tell her that this girl came to tempt me, that I foolishly left her alone in my study. I'll swear to her that nothing definite passed between us, and my word, if she divines the truth, I'll soothe her with a rendezvous." The prospect of thus pouring his confessions into Emmeline's breast restored his tran-

quillity, and when he asked the usher of the Palais Bourbon, "Is anybody waiting for me?" he would have been disappointed if Sergeant had not replied in the florid language that was usual to him: "Yes, M. le Ministre. There is a lady who has been waiting for you in the office of the 8th Committee a good quarter of an hour."

Was Sergeant playing at discretion, or had he really not recognized Emmeline Corbellier, who had haunted the Chamber for so many years?

Croze was inclined to this last hypothesis when he found himself in the hall of the 8th Committee, before the poor human, broken-down thing, bathed in tears, which he himself failed for a moment to recognize, but who, none the less, was Emmeline Corbellier. Her limbs trembled so that she couldn't even come to him; she only stretched out her hands as if asking him to draw her out of an abyss; she raised towards him a face that seemed in the very act of dissolving into tears, a face which no longer troubled about tightening its muscles so as to preserve a mask of youth, a face that the unwise golden hair aged at the present instance like a wig of a merry Andrew. He was immediately seized by these two thoughts: "Good God, how old she has got!" and "Is she going to add something more to the bill, as Lehoux calls it?" Immediately his selfishness armed him with defences.

"Well, what's happened?" he asked rather coldly.

"Jules . . . Jules . . ." stammered Emmeline, bursting into tears, "they know: my husband knows. . ."

Croze, absorbed in his own anxieties, thought that it was a matter of the documents. He sat down quickly beside Emmeline.

"What does he know? He can know only about Mag's departure? Except the Prefect of police, there is only you and I who know about the theft. I hope that you have not committed the imprudence of telling Corbellier?"

She made a gesture of struggling impatiently, a gesture of waving aside this story of stolen papers, and, swallowing her tears accordingly, she answered—

"No, not Mag. . . . It's Sandra, Loute's Italian governess. . . . I dismissed her the other day."

"Yes, I know."

"She took some letters that were in my jewel-case . . . so carefully hidden . . . letters that I was so attached to."

"What letters?"

"Letters from you, so good, the old ones, after the time in Mont Dore. . . . And then nice notes . . . afterwards . . . even this year. . . . All the ones that had a little tenderness in them . . . I kept them."

"You swore to me that you burnt them!"

"Yes, the ones that I didn't like . . . the little dry ones, the unkind ones, such as you write to me now. . . . But when I felt a little that you loved me . . . I couldn't part with them. . . . The hiding-place was so secure. . . . In my jewel-case. . . . Think!"

"It's a proof that the hiding-place was secure, that the letters have been stolen from you! How do you know that it's this girl?"

Emmeline raised her drenched eyes towards Croze.

"She has . . . she has sent them, half to my husband . . . half to your wife. Wait . . . she wrote to me about it."

"Name of . . . !" said Croze in a hollow voice.

Brutally he tore Sandra's letter from Emmeline's hands and ran his eyes over it—

"Madame, I said to you on leaving you: 'Wish that Jacques may not break the word that he has given me'! A month has gone by; Jacques has not written to me; he has not come to the rendezvous that we had arranged together; he has not answered my letters. I know that under your influence he has returned to his former way of life, and that Messieurs d'Amblin, Vorberg and Lartisan have become his friends once more. I am too proud to make entreaties, and as for punishing him, I have no wish to; he is not responsible; he is a child of whom I alone might have been able to make a man. You have prevented me from doing this. You have been the cause of his misfortune and my grief. It is right that you should be chastized. When one has a lover, particularly a conspicuous lover, Madame, one shuts up under a double lock one's amorous correspondence, otherwise one risks what is happening to you: namely, that your husband and Monsieur's wife may receive one day certain specimens of this correspondence. I assure you that Madame Croze will be exceedingly interested in those which should have reached her yesterday at Val d'Anay (by registered post). As for your husband, I trust, for the sake of his intelligence, that they will teach him nothing new, except a few details on your 'cursed temperament,' as M. Croze writes. . . . This is what your injustice, your dishonesty and your stupidity will cost you.—
SANDRA CERONI."

"Ah, that!" cried Croze, without finishing the letter, and crumpling it up in his clenched fist, which he extended towards Emmeline, who was startled

as though he were going to strike her in the face.

"You think that I haven't worries enough? Through your stupidity here's a new one that you have brought on us, ridiculous, absurd! She's right, that Italian. . . . Why didn't you let her marry your son? If you think that you will find it easy to settle him with the reputation that he has. . . . And then you dismiss an Italian woman in love, and imagine that it is all going to pass off in conversation and smiles?"

Emmeline wished to protest, to say—

"But you yourself advised us about this dismissal, you must remember."

He listened to nothing, but went on—

"You are then utterly stupid, my poor Emmeline? The astonishing part of it all is that the Italian didn't give you a stab with a knife. . . . Well, here we are in a nice mess now! Julie is good, Julie loves me, Julie has never wished to believe anything against me, that's clear enough; but letters signed by me, addressed to you; they are thrust right under her nose; she will be compelled to understand. And then who knows how one will be able to soothe her? She takes a long time to make up her mind, but when once her decision has been taken, nobody is more obstinate. Nothing will stop her. It will be the law-courts, scandal. And all through your fault. What necessity was there to keep those letters? And if you did keep them, weren't you able to shut them up? . . . And then—wait! I've had enough. . . . Let us stop there! Let us clear this business up, each on his own side. . . . I shall go and find Julie and say to her: 'It's true, I did commit this stupidity

long ago, and I've dragged it after me like a bullet for eleven years. But I'm getting rid of it with delight. Ouf !' And it will be no lie that I'm telling her. And if your husband wants to bother me, you can send him to me. . . . I'll willingly give him a good sword-thrust in the loins or in his face of a *cocu*. . . . Good-evening !" ¶

He went towards the door, puffing with a rage which increased as he spoke, and which he stimulated with his own words. The actual grasping of the door-lock gave him the first check, and he suddenly imagined himself as he would be after passing out and closing the door on Emmeline, separated from Emmeline for ever. He lingered a little before opening, waiting for a word, an appeal, a cry, the sound of a sob . . . but there was nothing ; she did not stir ; he could not even hear her breathe. Then he felt beginning inside him that same shiver which had frozen him as he leaned over the drawer, from which B. 2. 17 was missing. To keep himself in countenance he half opened the door, then closed it noisily, as if he were giving a final emphasis to his reply ; he turned round. Emmeline was still sitting on her chair, absolutely motionless. She had not, however, lost consciousness, since her large, wide-open eyes, now dry, followed all Croze's movements. Her face had changed its expression ; it had no longer that air of senile triviality that so often annoyed the Under-Secretary. A real depth of feeling, an utter despair, had driven all affectation out of it ; and Croze, abrupt and rough as he was, and little sensitive to emotion, could not watch this picture of feminine desolation without being troubled. He coughed ; he

let go of the knob of the closed door; still at a distance, he stammered out—

“Well? What?”

And as she still made no answer he came close to her, his tone softened, but he still tried to scold—

“It’s all very well your staying there on your chair and looking at me, but we are dished, all the same, and you’re the cause of it. . . . Come now, say something. Answer! Have you an idea, a plan?”

With her head she gave a negative sign. She still fixed her eyes on Croze. But when she saw that her silence exasperated him, and that he was going to become violent again, she forced herself to speak. Her mouth was twisted, her teeth chattered, her tongue seemed glued to her palate. He understood, however, the broken words—

“You said . . . you said that you . . . that you were glad . . . to . . . to be . . . be . . . rid of me.”

She burst again into tears, so overwhelmed that her hat, with the five hundred francs’ worth of aigrettes that crowned it, rolled on to the floor. Croze watched her, his heart torn by a pity which became stronger and stronger, and, for all that, too irritated still to yield, to console her. But amid the stammerings that escaped from her, between her sobs she found, as every woman sincerely in love finds, the word that it was necessary to say—the word that breaks down the resistance of male selfishness.

“And yet . . . and yet . . . Jules . . . we . . . have been . . . so happy.”

Scarcely had she said this than he was at her side, clasping her in his arms, rocking her, kissing her forehead and her face, caressing her, as if she were a poor scolded child that one forgives. . . . “We

have been so happy!" The past revived by these simple words spoken so humbly had suddenly taken possession once more of this man of fifty, who had reached that critical moment in which one feels that life will add nothing more really equal to the benefits already obtained, and that the question is especially to defend them against the destructive forces already threatening in every direction. "We have been so happy!" It was his youth, himself as a deputy of thirty-five, already distinguished in committees, counting already on the future, all the future, the Presidency of the Republic included. It was the strength and freshness of his body, that intangible something of vigour and health which pleased the eye at first glance; it was that appetite for adventures, that need of success and enjoyment, and it was that first meeting at Monte Dore with the rich, brilliant, perfectly correct woman of the world, the instant understanding between them of the eyes, the genuine passion, the happiness of possession. . . . Oh, yes, Emmeline was telling the truth; they had been very happy. . . . The whole of one side of his nature, the exuberant, impulsive, rather boyish side, suppressed in his own home, embarrassed before his wife whom he respected and admired, but whose piety and aristocratic tone always overawed him—all this ardent sensual side, rather Bohemian, rather simple, had been satisfied by Emmeline's love. And besides (more than Julie, his wife, who was always ready to curb him in the name of society and religion) Emmeline had been associated in his political ambitions. With the instinct of a woman in love, who is not encumbered by moral scruples, she had shown herself twenty times a shrewd counsellor, incapable of

giving reasons for her advice, but saying obstinately : "You must accept that, and refuse this," and rarely had she been wrong. While he held her against his heart, the long years of sincere fellowship, body and soul, that this poor sobbing being had given him of her own free will came back to his heart, evoked by the "We have been so happy." The good and the bad in him, a tender gratitude of the head and of the senses, combined with the fear of losing a mascot, made him cling to Emmeline.

"You are right," he murmured, "I have been disgusting. . . . But I am so tormented! Really, I scarcely know what I am saying. Forget these stupidities; I don't really mean a word of them. We will be happy together still, indeed we will, my poor darling. . . . If they bring too many miseries on us, we'll stand all the closer together, both of us, eh? Won't we? Come, smile for me."

She gave him the smile he asked for, a smile that brought back to him for a moment her "Mont Dore face," as she used to say.

Ah, little it mattered to her, catastrophe, divorce, loss of money and everything else, if her lover could only remain nearer and more affectionate after the smash.

CHAPTER II

INSPECTOR MERCADIEUX

"WHERE are you going, Blanche?"

"To the chapel. Are you coming with me?"

That "Are you coming with me?" which Baroness Ropart d'Anay addressed to her sister, Julie Croze, on meeting her in the hall of the château, was tinged with a tender supplication and a persuasive pity. . . . As Croze had foreseen, Julie, from the moment that Sandra's letter had opened her eyes, experienced the bitter blow of a great confidence that had been betrayed. Grave, outwardly a little cold, she loved and looked up to her husband, and her own horror of falsehood had always prevented her from believing that a man whom she loved and admired could be a gross liar. Disabused in this, she had immediately refused every explanation, every interview with the guilty one; she had called Josette down to Val d'Anay beside her by telegram. Her principles forbade divorce, but she demanded a separation, and the endeavours of her sister, Baroness Ropart d'Anay, the efforts of Guy, who had been despatched on an embassy to her, had not, up till now, succeeded in bending her purpose.

"Do come," repeated the Baroness, who felt that her sister was rebelling against Providence, "come, to please me. Remember that I have sorrow, I too."

She took her arm and drew her away, without

having obtained from her an actual consent. The chapel was situated at the northern extremity of the main building; it was the old chapel, modestly decorated, but peaceful and reminiscent, of the religious community which had occupied the château before the Revolution. There floated over it that atmosphere which arises from places where many human beings have knelt, have bowed their heads, have clasped their hands, have murmured supplications. To this accumulation of intense hope, of ardent desire exhaled beneath the arches, the stones—one would imagine—do not remain insensible; they become magnetized little by little through the flight of ages, and it is the living soul of centuries, this fervour which is exhaled from their flagstones, their pillars and their vaults.

Now the two sisters, the two half-widows, knelt side by side in front of the chancel-rail. A clear light—filtered through the simple, rough glass windows. Around, the whole of Val d'Anay—towards the warmest part of the day following the mid-day rest—was bathed in silence. Hector, Jean and Henriette were travelling in Switzerland with the Abbé; they had been hurried off abroad, so as to be kept away from the scandalous rumours in the neighbourhood. Josette seemed plunged in a despair even deeper than that of her mother; except for the prattling of the twins, Violette and Marguerite, who continued to shoot up among the ruins of the household, Val d'Anay, where no visitors were now received, would have resembled the castle of the Sleeping Beauty. . . . In this mournful silence, under the shadow of old stones magnetized by so many prayers of women, the two half-widows knelt side by side. But only one of

the two was praying. The rebellious heart of Julie Croze resisted even the religious magnetism of the soothing chapel. She did not accuse God; her faith was too intimately interwoven with the fibres of her heart, for her rebellion to turn to imprecation or blasphemy. Only she, whose piety was so steadfast and so sincere, could no longer speak to God, and it was in vain at this moment that, like her sister, she bent her knees and crossed her fingers over her eyes; she had simply performed the usual gestures. Her reflections had nothing of prayer in them.

She was thinking, with a force more concentrated than in the past, about that which she had never ceased from thinking of since the arrival of the letters sent by Sandra—

"I have been a fool, a dupe. I have been stupid. I believed that a man without principles and without religion could be a faithful husband. . . . It's impossible; I'm certain now that he was never faithful to me even for a single month. For I recollect now that afternoon when I met him in the Rue Tilsit, the month after our marriage, just at the time when he had told me that he would be at the Chamber. . . . And the trip to Mont Dore when he became entangled with that woman! He wrote me from there such affectionate letters, telling me that he was thinking of me and his children. . . . When he was Secretary of Fine Arts I was warned by an anonymous letter that he had one mistress in the Odéon Company, and another in that of the Opéra-Comique. That made me laugh; I showed him the letter, and he made fun of it! Ah! fool, fool. . . . And this German woman, this good-for-nothing, this spy—Guy has done his best to persuade me that there was no intrigue between her

and Jules, and that she got into Jules' private room without his knowledge. . . . No, no! I'm not to be taken in any more by such nonsense. She was his mistress, she possessed him at the same time that I did, at the same time that the Corbellier woman did. . . . Ah! terrible, terrible! . . ."

She put the sound of her voice into the articulation of these last words, for gradually her lips had moved under the tempest of her burning thoughts. The Baroness turned her eyes for a moment towards her and she blushed and hid her face entirely with her hands. For her part, the Baroness was praying. She was not pondering over her miseries and her grievances, like Julie Croze; she was conversing truly with the redoubtable and mysterious Ruler of Destiny, hidden behind the door of the Tabernacle, whom she adored. But even her prayer was not quite like those that she had formerly prayed, before the disappearance of Baron Henri. . . . Then she used to tell everything to God; she trusted in Him as in an all-powerful Friend, but One quite near to her, One who knew all her wishes in advance; she used to open her heart to Him. To-day, she still prayed; she prayed with more ardour than ever; only she experienced a little embarrassment, not in praying but in formulating her prayer. Prostrate in her widow's weeds before the Sovereign Master she could not say to him: "Lord, receive the soul of my husband." For deep in her heart her conviction protested against this request. And that shame which in the face of the outside world made her accept the hypothesis of a fatal accident and reject haughtily that of an amorous trick, that shame did not leave her when she was alone before her God. She did not like to say to God:

"Send me back the prodigal." She did not like to confess, *even to God*, that she admitted the possible delinquency of the head of the family. . . . And with a mingling of Christian humility and wifely pride, she repeated this orison : "My God, wherever he may be now, take him under Thy pity and protect him ! His wife and children have need of him . . . but if Thy will is to take him from us, do not take from us also, I implore Thee, the honour of our house !" Then she prayed for her sister whose rebellion caused her a kind of astonishment as if she had seen her possessed by a devil. She begged the Divine Master to calm this rebel soul and inspire it with leniency and the wish for self-sacrifice. And as she prayed thus, in the very depths of her heart she thought : "Ah, if I were in her place ! If I had only to say : 'Come back, it's forgotten,' for my husband to be once more among us !"

A warning bell which was not that of the chapel, sounded in the distance, a peal of a few seconds followed by two brief tinklings.

"That is for you," said Julie.

"Let us go and see."

Truly enough it was the "bell for Madame la Baronne," that for the Baron had, after a short peal, only one vibration. But that, for a long time, had not been heard any more. . . . The two sisters left the chapel and went together towards the château. As they crossed the central court, they met the valet, who, on perceiving them, brought a visiting-card on a tray—

"Mercadieux, Inspector of the Prefecture of Police." In spite of her coolness and her complete

self-control, Madame Ropart d'Anay trembled, and her cheeks became young again in their blush. She had seen the Inspector twice already in Paris, in his office, soon after the Baron's disappearance. Since he had come himself to Val d'Anay, and unexpectedly, it must be that he was bringing news.

"Show him into Monsieur's study," she said quickly regaining her attitude of composure. And she added, for her sister's ear: "I ask you not to leave me; you'll do what I ask?"

"Certainly I will," replied Julie Croze, "but on condition that this policeman speaks solely about your affairs. . . . If he makes the slightest allusion to the stolen documents, if he pronounces the name of my husband, I shall leave the room."

Madame Croze affected to be unwilling to listen to anything that concerned the catastrophe of her own household. Between her and her husband the tie was broken, she considered, once and for ever; neither Josette nor Guy nor the Baroness should speak of it.

Inspector Mercadieux was standing waiting in the little room formerly called "my office" by the Baron, and which then served principally for the making of cartridges and as a *dépôt* for specimens of grain. Everything remained just as it was at the moment when the master of the house, before mounting César, had for the last time brooded there on his plan. Care was taken that the room should be well kept and preserve an air of life.

"Good-day, Monsieur," said the Baroness, holding out her hand to the Inspector who bowed very low. . . . "Madame is my sister, Madame Croze. Sit down please and tell me what brings you here."

The two sisters, being seated, the Baroness in front

of the desk and her sister on a chair beside her, Mercadieux remained standing. The Baroness insisted—

"Sit down, Monsieur, I beg of you."

He obeyed, but only sat half on the chair as if to apologize for seating himself before ladies. He was dressed in a dark grey suit, almost black, just noticeable under the dust-coat buttoned up in front. In his hands, covered with heavy brown gloves, he held a straw hat with a black ribbon. His good French face, large and plebeian, with its black moustache, its black horseshoe beard, betrayed an intelligent effort to recollect thoroughly, and present thoroughly what he was going to say. Before speaking he looked for some time at the red matting on the floor, wrinkling his forehead under the black hair which was of such vigorous abundance.

"Well, Madame la Baronne," he said at last, raising his eyes—two eyes of the colour of clear coffee, filled with southern lucidity—"there is a little news, and it is for that reason that M. le Préfet sent me down. He did not let you know beforehand of my visit, and he told me to tell you that he omitted to do so on purpose. He feared worrying you uselessly, twenty-four or forty-eight hours in advance. We knew that you were not leaving Val d'Anay . . . then what risk did I run in coming down myself?"

"Yes, you were quite right," answered the Baroness. "Thank M. Lehoux for his intelligent consideration."

Mercadieux went on in the same measured tone, with the same air of being anxious to omit nothing and of weighing his words well—

"The last results of the inquiry made here by the

police of the department with whom I have been associated have not been contradicted by subsequent facts. The Cher has brought up no corpse; a corpse thrown up by the waters of the Loire, has been identified; besides, it was that of a woman. They have found no other piece of M. le Baron's clothes, except those left conspicuously on the bank. Our conviction has not then changed; Madame's husband has not been drowned in the Cher."

"God will that you may be right, Monsieur," said the Baroness, without showing any emotion.

"But if he has not been accidentally drowned in the Cher," continued Mercadieux, "as the first appearances indicated, there has then been deception. There has been a wish to conceal disappearance. Had anybody any interest in suppressing Madame's husband, or of hiding him? That is what we have been investigating, as much in Paris as in your neighbourhood. Now, as the result of our investigations, it is clear as day that M. le Baron had no enemy, that his disappearance left his affairs perfectly in order, and, allow me to add, Madame (I'm here, am I not, to state things as they are?) that he had no known relations with any woman who was a native of this part of the country or Paris."

"You are informing me of nothing new," said the Baroness rather drily.

"Then," continued the Inspector, "M. le Baron Ropart d'Anay did not die by drowning. No one had any interest in making him disappear; consequently, he disappeared of his own accord, while endeavouring to have his disappearance attributed to an accident."

Madame Croze, hearing these deductions, seemed much more annoyed than her sister. She could not resist interrupting—

"And who is to say that my brother-in-law has not been the victim of one of those bands of apaches, so many of which are discovered nowadays in the provinces? One may suppose that he had money with him the day when he went to Baugis, as the farm had been half destroyed and the farmers were asking for immediate relief?"

"Madame," replied Mercadieux, "professionals would never have imagined a *mise en scène* quite so simple in order to conceal the seizure or assassination of a traveller. And then, after his assassination, what could they have done with him as they did not drown him?"

"I don't know; they might have thrown him into a hole . . . buried him, burnt him. . . ."

"No, Madame, they have neither burnt nor buried the corpse of your brother-in-law, and without enumerating all the professional objections to the hypothesis, I am coming at once to the decisive reason. M. le Baron Henri, who was not drowned in the Cher, has been neither assassinated nor hidden away, for the incontrovertible reason that he is actually alive, in perfect health, and that this is his photograph, taken scarcely ten days ago."

This time the Baroness departed from her apparent indifference for a moment; she almost snatched the photograph from Mercadieux' hands and looked at it for some seconds while Julie also examined it over her shoulder. Julie had not the slightest doubt; the man in the light suit and the travelling cap, in this minute but extremely clear photograph (a snap-

shot), was Henri Ropart d'Anay, with his moustache shaved off, which undoubtedly changed him very much. He was leaning against the railing of a packet-boat; a smooth sea streamed in the sunlight in the background. Blanche Ropart d'Anay regained her composure and handed the little photograph back to the police-officer.

"This person," she said, "has, undoubtedly, some of my husband's features."

"What! Madame! you do not recognize the Baron formally? and you, Madame Croze?"

"There is a strong resemblance," Julie ventured to say.

"And this other portrait, do you recognize the person?"

Still in the same surroundings of a packet-boat, still from a hand camera, a young woman was represented, leaning back in a weary attitude on a deck-chair. Julie was on the point of exclaiming "Rosalie," but she saw such pain changing the expression of her sister, who was also leaning over the photograph, that she refrained from speaking. The Baroness remained motionless for a second, her eyes on the photograph. Her lips moved; doubtless she was praying. A few moments more went by before she could speak. At last she said, as she placed on the desk the photograph that Mercadieux took back—

"As far as I can judge, it is the photograph of a young girl who was in my service here."

"Yes, Madame," answered the Inspector, "it is the photograph of the girl Boisset born in the suburbs of Arlon. The photographs that I have just submitted to you were taken at Lisbon last week, more precisely,

ten days ago, before the departure of the *São-Paulo*, which is on its way to Brazil. The name given by the travellers is M. and Mme. Colin. They embarked together at Bordeaux on June 28th, after staying together for a day at the little hotel de la Couronne, Place d'Italie, in Paris. I repeat, ladies, no doubt is possible; we have informed ourselves of the whole life of Baron Henri from the very evening of his disappearance; the *São-Paulo* will arrive at Rio towards the end of this month; the two travellers will be on board, for the boat makes no more calls before it reaches Brazil. So if you wish at the present moment to get into communication with them, Madame, M. Lehoux told me that he proposed having a talk with you and furnishing you with a few directions. For our duties and those of French justice are at an end. We have not to follow up assassins, since the assumed victim is in perfect health. And, on the other hand, M. le Baron Henri's flight with this young girl does not constitute a crime that justifies an official visit from one of our agents."

"But who proposes that you should, Monsieur," the Baroness interrupted, rather coldly, "send out agents in pursuit of M. and Mme. Colin?"

"Oh, naturally, Madame, that depends on you. . . . If you wish to break altogether with your husband . . ."

"I have not broken with my husband. My husband has disappeared, and you tell me that M. Colin, who has some resemblance to my husband, has embarked for Brazil with Rosalie Boisset. It remains to be proved that M. Colin is really my husband."

"But it is indisputable, Madame," answered the

Inspector, whose professional pride was beginning to be irritated by this resistance; "I repeat to you that all the doings of M. le Baron Ropart, from the moment that he left Val d'Anay, have been reconstructed. If a train had not been late, we should have caught up with him at Bordeaux, which would have been advantageous, for then we could have put our hands on the girl Boisset, and expelled her as a foreigner. . . . We know also that their going away together was planned for several weeks, in fact, from the time that the girl Boisset was brought by the girl Riemann—then a governess in your house, Madame," he added, turning to Madame Croze, who had suddenly gone quite pale—"to consult a midwife in the Rue Taitbout, who judged her to be two months *enceinte*."

Baroness Ropart d'Anay rose to her feet at these words.

"Let us put an end to this conversation, Monsieur," she said, her face pale, but her voice firm and her eyes dry. "The adventures of the girl Boisset, as you call her, have no interest for me. If this unhappy one has turned out badly, it is no fault of mine. In our house she has seen none but honourable examples. But I shall not permit the name of Baron Ropart d'Anay to be associated with this ignoble story of betrayal and flight. . . . Your M. Colin is, for me, M. Colin and nothing more; that he resembles more or less the Baron does not deprive me of my conviction that the Baron was incapable of doing what you assert. . . . And if you prove to me, which you have not done, that M. Colin is, indeed, my husband, and that my husband is accompanying Rosalie Boisset to Brazil, I shall preserve the firm belief that my

husband plays no other part in regard to this girl but that of charity and pity; that he has taken it upon himself to excuse another's fault and to give aid to a sinner, but that he himself is still worthy of his name, and of the affection of his own. . . . The day when it pleases him to return here, he will return with his head erect. He is the master. I have nothing more, then, to ask of you, Monsieur. Give my thanks to M. Lehoux, and tell him that I desire the inquiry to be closed."

She gave the stupefied Mercadieux a cold bow and left the little room quickly, leaving her sister with the police officer.

"My word, Madame," said he, "in my life I have seen many ladies whom their husbands . . . in brief, many ladies deceived and deserted. But never one, on my honour, like Madame, your sister-in-law. . . . Ah, she is a lady with character; she is not easy to get on with . . . but one is compelled, all the same, to respect her. Besides, that doesn't stand on all fours, her idea. . . . She doesn't reflect that it will be necessary to decide absolutely if the Baron is dead or alive, if for nothing else, for questions of interest. . . ."

The office door was quickly opened; Josette Croze appeared, and without even glancing at Mercadieux, ran to her mother.

"Mamma," she said, "Aunt Blanche is unwell. . . . When she came into the drawing-room where I was, she had a kind of fainting fit. She is lying on the sofa. . . . She is asking for you."

"It's the reaction," murmured Mercadieux. "Poor lady!"

"Will you excuse me, Monsieur?" said Madame

Croze. "Josette, ring the bell for some one to accompany Monsieur."

She went out quickly.

Left alone with the Inspector, Josette said—

"Excuse me, Monsieur, I did not quite understand what Mamma said to me. Where are you to be accompanied?"

"I am taking the train that starts for Paris at four, Mademoiselle. Don't disturb any one on my account. I will go through the woods to the station; it's only about a mile and a half on foot, just time to smoke a cigar."

"Then, Monsieur, I will tell some one to accompany you as far as the private road."

"No thanks, Mademoiselle," said Mercadieux, stopping the young girl who was in the act of ringing, "I know the road. I have been here before. I am the Inspector of Police, Mercadieux."

While pronouncing his name he looked attentively at Josette's face and, as he expected, Josette became uneasy immediately. She was incapable of moving or speaking. Scarcely paler than usual, but with a pallor beneath which the life-blood seemed no longer to circulate, she waited, so obviously terrorized that the man's pity was roused.

"Have no fear, Mademoiselle," he said. "I am very pleased that chance has brought us together alone for a moment; I should have been obliged to ask permission to speak to you, and that might have seemed odd. . . . But please calm yourself, and don't be afraid. I have nothing painful to tell you. . . . On the contrary. . . . There . . . it seems to me that this will be the best. Are you ready to go out with me as though you were showing me the

way to the private road? "Because, if we remain here, Madame your mother or Madame your aunt are sure to come back."

Josette nodded her acquiescence, and regaining her self-control, opened the door and led the way out. They exchanged no word as they crossed the court, but as soon as the outbuildings were passed, the Inspector, watching the young girl from the corner of his eye, said—

"It's like this, Mademoiselle. . . . In the course of the inquiry that we have made to recover the documents which your governess stole from Monsieur, your father, we have been led to investigate a certain ground-floor with two entrances, situated—don't be uneasy, I assure you that you are in no danger. . . . All this is absolutely *sécret*, and Monsieur your father himself knows nothing about it. In this ground-floor a certain number of letters belonging to Monsieur Bolski, and others belonging to Monsieur de Letzling, his friend, have been seized. There are among them three notes from you and a longer letter, which have nothing to do with the affair of the stolen documents. Monsieur le Préfet has undertaken not to attach them to the official file, and he has charged me to return them to you. Walk a little in front of me. . . . Put out your left hand; there! Close your hand on the envelope quickly, you can't be seen from the château; I conceal you; I'm not so slight as you. So! You've got it? Ah, I'm very pleased, and Monsieur le Préfet will be pleased too."

"Thank you," stammered Josette, to whose cheeks a little warmth was now returning.

They had reached the private road; the young girl continued to walk for some time beside Mercadieux in silence. At last she decided to ask—

"Is M. de Letzling in Vienna?"

"We believe him to be there, Mademoiselle."

"Do you know why he went away suddenly?"

"Surely because of the affair of the documents. M. Bolski appears as the instigator of your governess, and M. de Letzling is intimate with M. Bolski."

"M. de Letzling is incapable of committing such an infamy," cried Josette.

Mercadieux thought to himself—

"Is she going to begin again like her aunt? They have confidence ingrained in their very souls in this family. . . ."

"My word, Mademoiselle!" he said, "you are perhaps right. To tell the truth, we know that M. de Letzling is in Austria, that he has had an interview with the Minister of War, who is his uncle; but beyond that there is no more news of him. Is he on a secret mission? Possibly. His family, his military set, they become dumb over there in regard to him; it's the watchword. You have received no letters from him?"

"None," replied Josette.

"Then you are no better informed than we are. . . . All my respects, Mademoiselle. . . . Very happy to have been useful to you. All my respects also to those two ladies, your mother and your aunt."

Josette remained standing for some time on the spot where Mercadieux had left her; she saw receding along the road a large round back on which the dust coat, lit up by the sun, gleamed like a cuirass. The emotion at having recovered her letters had not died out; her cheeks preserved their excitement. "The pretty girl," thought Mercadieux, as he went on at a good pace, "what a pity that she chose as her lover this coward of a German, who was a spy at her

expense." For Mercadier had no doubt that Josette had been Letzling's mistress, and that Letzling, in agreement with Bolski, had planned the theft of the documents. . . . Josette, motionless in the shadow zone cast by the plane trees on the private road, Josette, erect, slender as an Egyptian in her sheath of white cloth, a white flexible hat posed on her dusky hair, Josette, she too, was thinking of Letzling. She, too, in the depths of her agonized heart, felt the same conjecture beginning to shape itself: Letzling the accomplice of Mag and Bolski! But she rejected it instinctively, as the throat and stomach sometimes reject, in a reflex spasm, a poison that would cause death if it were absorbed. To continue living, and to be sure of this atrocious thing! She knew well that she would not be able to do that. And as, in spite of the spasm of horror that it provoked, the hideous conjecture rose up again and again, each time also a ghastly presentiment deadened her heart. All this—and this was the worst of all—must be borne alone, without confiding in anybody; this dreadful anxiety must be shut up in her own heart, this anxiety compared with which the other catastrophes that had happened in the family seemed to her paltry: the disappearance of her uncle, her father's quarrel with her mother, and the threatened ruin of his political career. She was for the moment separated from her only natural confidant, Guy, whom she loved. Guy was helping his father in Paris, and while helping him, doing his best to save from the general ruin his own marriage with Yvonne. Besides, if Guy had been beside Josette, how could she dare to tell this brother, who was so jealous of his sister's reputation, that she had met Letzling quite alone in a secret place?

Slowly she returned to the steps of Val d'Anay and lingered on the cool terrace looking out at this peaceful Solognote landscape: lawns, birchwoods and pines, the paleness of a pond in the distance. . . .

"I was wrong," she thought, "to let this Mercadieux go away without asking him to inform me about Adolf as soon as he himself knows anything. He says that no one is willing to give any news over there. How can that be? Supposing I went to see the Ambassador? He, too, is a relation of Adolf's, and I danced with him last winter. He was even very gracious, very complimentary to me. Oh, what am I to do? what am I to do?" Once again the horrible thought: "Adolf was in league with Bolski and Mag. . . . Adolf made use of me in order to pursue his profession of a uniformed spy . . ." stirred the spasm of terror in the young girl's heart. And once again the mournful reply: "Then . . . then . . . disappear," cast, as it were, a veil of crape between her eyes and the peaceful landscape. She had to lean against a bench on the terrace as she was nearly fainting . . . then the vice-like pressure of her agonizing thought relaxed, and she was able to breathe again. She was comforted by hearing in the drawing-room through the open windows the quick voice of her mother conversing with the composed voice of her aunt. Madame Ropart d'Anay said—

"But where is Josette?"

"I don't know," said Madame Croze. "I left her with that Mercadieux, and I think that she had him shown the way to the station. But where on earth can she be herself?"

Josette made sure of her voice, and replied—

"I am here, mother."

CHAPTER III

TWO YOUNG GIRLS OF TO-DAY

FROM the day on which Sandra had warned her that she was sending M. Corbellier a collection of her amorous correspondence, Emmeline lived between two exciting alternatives. In the first place, she anticipated the classic scene of the outraged husband: "Madame, you are unworthy to bear my name," and prepared herself to meet it in accordance with the traditions of romance and the theatre, which constituted almost the whole of her moral education. Without daring to confess everything to Jacques, she had let him understand her distress. Jacques, who had become very quickly once more the companion of Carlin and d'Amblin; Jacques, on whom Sandra's passing influence had left no appreciable trace; Jacques, who loved, in his own words, "to pinch his soul," had profited by the occasion to lead poor Emmeline into crises of exalted sensibility, in which she cursed love and swore to her son that she would live only for him in a saintly chastity. Then, as the scene with her husband did not burst out, and as Maurice Corbellier continued living beside her the same life as before—parallel rather than conjugal—she began to hope again. Perhaps Sandra's vengeance was confined to a threat; perhaps a providential chance had prevented the dangerous missive from reaching its destination; more probably (this was

Croze's opinion) Corbellier had thrown into the fire letters which, except for a few disagreeable details, could, doubtless, have taught him nothing new. At this stage Emmeline would have been reassured, not without a touch of scorn for Corbellier, had not Madame Croze's rebellion, her refusal to continue living with her husband, her insistence on exacting a legal separation, kept the threat of the blow still in suspense. Informed privately, Corbellier might have pretended ignorance; but a scandal that Croze's personality would make public would compel him to act.

The days, however, flew by, and, thanks to Corbellier's silence on the one part, thanks on the other part to the pressure brought to bear on Julie by her sister and her son, the façades of the two households, Croze and Corbellier, remained still upright without any apparent fracture. Corbellier and his wife were seen taking part together in the obsequies of poor Madame Haumont-Segré, who had died without having seen her daughter again, and without her daughter accompanying her to the last resting-place. Croze was seen there without Madame Croze, but she was known to be with her sister, Madame Ropart d'Anay, and so it only turned the gossip on to the adventure of the Baron, which was already half forgotten. As for the matter of the stolen documents—the early indiscretions of the Press having been immediately muzzled by what the Prefect Lehoux called the “blue muzzle,” and as scarcely four or five people knew the realities of the facts, and the reporter of the commission had not yet had the curiosity to look at B. 2. 17 again—Croze still hoped to come out of the affair undamaged, except for being

well bled in money. B. 2. 17 had not been offered to any Government of the Triple Alliance, and a certain London house which acted as an amiable intermediary between the robbed and the robbers asked Croze for a million francs on the part of the withholders of the documents. Croze offered two hundred thousand francs, after making up his mind to yield at three hundred thousand.

Things were at this stage when one July morning, at ten o'clock, exactly twelve days after the date on which he had signed the receipt of Sandra's packet in the postman's book, Maurice Corbellier, after having carefully inspected one by one the drawers of his "Jules Grévy" cabinet, and ascertained that certain patient work, undertaken without witnesses during the whole of the preceding week, had only passed over papers that were devoid of importance—after having verified one by one the contents of his old black morocco leather case that he usually carried under his arm on his way to and from the works—Maurice Corbellier, after all this, asked his valet if "Madame was still in the house," and received this answer, which did not seem to surprise him—

"No, Monsieur; Madame has already gone out with M. Jacques. Monsieur knows that Madame and M. Jacques have gone to lunch at Versailles, and will be present at that new musical piece of M. Vorberg that they are playing at the Trianon. Madame and M. Jacques will only be in for dinner."

"Quite true," replied Corbellier peaceably. "Send Mademoiselle Loute to me."

Loute was at present without a governess, as Emmeline did not dare even to look for one. The

second maid accompanied her to her classes, and Jacques was supposed to supervise the musical instruction of his sister. In regard to the rest of her studies, Loute, on her own initiative, had formed the habit of appealing to her father. Living thus, even more than formerly, in intimacy with this father whom she loved and by whom she felt herself loved, she was much too observant not to have noticed something that had escaped her mother, her brother and even the servants, namely, that for the last eight days Corbellier was occupied in methodical preparations--arrangements of drawers, classifications of files, papers burnt in heaps in the fireplace, papers brought out of the house in the old black morocco case. Several times, too, while her father was reading again with her the lessons she was preparing for her class, the telephone had sounded quite near them: "Hullo! . . . Yes, it's I, Corbellier. . . . Ah, it's you, Maître Ridou. Wait a moment . . ." and then immediately: "Loute, go and wait a minute in the drawing-room; I'll call you." She had asked no questions, but, ferreting in a book of reference, she had unearthed: "Ridou (Frédéric), solicitor, 23 Rue Condorcet." And the dictionary had completed the information: "Solicitor, ministerial officer, entitled to take proceedings for parties before the Inferior Courts and the Courts of Appeal." All these observations were put in order and arranged in her head; she compared them with the crises of confusion to which she saw her mother a prey, and some snatches of which she had gathered from conversations between her mother and Jacques. She was sure, in fine, that her father seemed more busy than melancholy, that he showed more fondness for her than ever, that he spoke

often to her of a certain trip to Rosendael. Many years ago there had been a flight there of father and daughter for three days, while Emmeline and Jacques were in the country—three days that had remained in the little one's mind like three illuminations in a black night. All these observations and meditations of hers, taken together, were sufficient to warn Loute of important events, events of which a secret instinct made her have no fear. But long trained as she was in dissimulation (she had always felt herself weak and subordinate in this house, a feeble prolongation of the feeble head of the family, whose brilliant and tyrannical masters were Emmeline and Jacques), she had no difficulty in keeping silent, divining that questions would have embarrassed her father. She entered the study carrying, as usual, her exercise-books, and as usual she settled down on Corbellier's knees. The revision of her lessons was made in this way, their heads touching, and both of them derived from this work in common a pleasure doubled by the discovery of a marvellous phenomenon, that of reciprocal comprehension. It seemed to them that their two brains communicated one with the other; never had Loute made such rapid progress. They were astonished at it in the class. But this particular morning Corbellier gently closed the exercise-books that his daughter had opened in front of him.

"We are not going to work to-day. It's a holiday," he said.

She believed that he was joking, as she saw no reason for this July Friday being a holiday. She humoured the pleasantry, however, and while her father was rocking her on his knees, asked what they were going to do, as they were not working.

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"Well," said Corbellier in the same tone, "what do you say to a trip to Rosendael for us two?"

But that did not make her laugh; the recollection of the three days of solitude, her father and she in front of the sea, these three times twenty-four hours spent almost without letting go of each other's hands—this was in her memory something almost religious. She worried her father's thin tie rather nervously, as in a very low tone she said—

"You mustn't joke about that, Papa."

"But I'm not joking," cried Corbellier. "I ask you very seriously if you would like to leave to-day for Rosendael with me?"

The little girl's yellow amber eyes grew big with astonishment, and at the same time her ugly little face lit up; she understood at last. She understood that this proposed departure was connected with the preparations that she had discovered, and also with the absence for the whole day of her mother and Jacques. Father and daughter, with exactly the same expression on their faces, which were so like each other, exchanged a smile of complicity.

"Oh, would it be possible?" murmured the little girl.

"Yes, it is possible. How much time must you have to get ready a little trunk with underclothes and one or two dresses?"

"Not even an hour, Papa . . . half-an-hour, if Juliet helps me. Can I tell her?"

Juliet was the second maid who took Louie to her classes.

"Yes, tell Juliet from me to help you. Off you go now. In three-quarters of an hour we'll run away together."

And, in truth, three-quarters of an hour later the bewildered servants of the Corbelliers watched this spectacle : Monsieur and Mademoiselle together entering a taxi-cab which the valet had gone to fetch, and on which had been placed, side by side with Loute's little trunk, her father's valise. Corbellier carried, in addition, under his arm the black morocco case. They listened for the address flung at the driver ; but it was : "The post office, in the same street." On the way Corbellier, against whom Loute pressed herself without uttering a word, and who himself had not a very assured air, leaned out of the carriage door and said—

"Go to 23 Rue Condorcet."

Loute in this way was introduced to the house of Ridou (Frédéric), solicitor, whom she used to try vainly to imagine to herself every time that her father, at the buzzing of the telephone, sent her to ponder in the drawing-room. But she did not see Ridou himself. She was shown with her father into a gloomy, narrow room, lit from a little court. The walls were covered partly by the shelves of bookcases, partly by pigeon-holes of green pasteboard. The central table had on it a mass of papers. Loute remained there alone, as almost at once a little clerk had come to look for Corbellier. She even remained there so long that she had full time to inspect the books that lay in rows along the shelves : *Dallos, The Notary's Journal, The Revue du Palais*, together with—an unexpected intrusion, doubtless forgotten by a lady client—*La Môme Picrate*, by Willy. . . . The inspection of the bookcase being over, she would willingly have rummaged about in the green pigeon-holes, only the fear of being caught prevented her. Then she

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approached the table and opened a brief. Listening for the sound of footsteps, so as to be able to close the cover in case of surprise, she read, first of all listlessly, then with attention—

“Divorce: Hanin v. Hanin.”

“At the petition of M. Hanin, having for solicitor Maître Audoyer.

“Whereas the demand of the lady Hanin against her husband based on the deterioration of the fortune brought by her into the family is invalid.

“As on the contrary, the gentleman Hanin has proof of his wife’s relations with different people.

“For these reasons may it please the Tribunal—

“To pronounce divorce, by reason of the wrongs and injuries of the lady Hanin, and to entrust to the father the guardianship of his only daughter, strictly limiting the circumstances under which this child may see her mother, with whom she is in danger of receiving bad examples . . .”

Loute read this, and never, even when she studied her geography book (for which she had no taste, her memory being restive), had she opened her eyes so wide, or had projected further through her lips her little pale and pointed tongue, as though she wished actually to drink in the words on the pages. . . . She obviously concentrated all her efforts on grasping the strange jargon of the purring grabbers; certainly she did not succeed; but, in her head, the things that she did not understand were specified and determined, and that itself is half of understanding. . . . So absorbed was she that she had no time to close the brief when her father returned. She became crimson.

“What the deuce are you reading?” said he.

“‘Divorce: Hanin v. Hanin.’ Little Paul Pry!

Come, leave that, and let's start; we are off to Rosendaël."

He had a more satisfied and a bolder air than when they left their home together just now. Father and daughter, however, did not speak much, while the same cab brought them to the Gare du Nord. They followed their own thoughts, but they held each other's hands, and in this way felt comforted. At the station Corbellier seemed particularly anxious not to be seen by acquaintances. He had purposely chosen a slow train with few passengers. They were able to settle down together alone in an empty compartment. But their delight did not quite let itself go until the moment when the train, noisily belching out its smoke, had passed out of the glazed shelter of the station. Then they felt free. Then they threw their arms round each other's necks and burst out laughing; then they even attempted a few steps of a wild dance, which was interrupted by the critical apparition of a spectacled ticket-collector, who thought they were mad.

Never had the escape of lovers been more tender, more joyful, more filled with enthusiasm than this flight of father and daughter to this modest northern watering-place. Even the recollections of the first trip had been surpassed. Then it had been only a furtive escapade: one knew that, three days later, one must return. This time, on the contrary, both were free for life; free to look at each other, hold each other's hands, caress each other, without being criticized; free to tell each other all that passed through their minds, delivered from the disdainful glances, ironical remarks, reminders of their inferiority which neither Emmeline nor Jacques were accustomed

to spare them. Loute dreaded her mother, and against her brother she nourished a dog-and-cat antipathy. As for Corbellier, after having desired Emmeline, with that obstinacy of weak people who often exert all their energy in an unlooked-for exercise of will-power, only, immediately afterwards, to fall back into the old indecision and apathy; after having loved her in the early days of their marriage, he had ended, in the course of fifteen years of rebuffs, in gradually detaching himself from her altogether. Loute, growing up, courted the tenderness that had become available in his heart. Still proud of being the husband of the beautiful Madame Corbellier, he had become concentrated on his love for his daughter and the progress of his factory. And, asking for nothing more, he had organized for himself a painful inner life in which the taunts and contumely of his wife no longer reached him. What the world was ignorant of and would not have admitted was precisely that he believed her to be faithful. Bourgeois by blood, having known in his own family only irreproachable wives, adultery always seemed to him something terrible, something that would not penetrate into firmly established and regular homes like his. The revelation was actually furnished by the package that Sandra Ceroni sent, letters chosen in such a way that he knew at once the original date of his misfortune and its actual continuation. He remained a whole morning like one stupefied. It was seeing Emmeline again that restored him: an Emmeline overwhelmed, pale with agony, watching him through the corners of her anxious eyes; an Emmeline who had given up her tyrannical or teasing airs and become docile, almost kind. Before this admitted weakness he felt himself strong;

he also felt that he no longer loved his wife in the slightest degree; he was sure that he despised her, and that she was dead for him. And the second great resolution of his life was immediately formed in his mind with the suddenness and immutability of the first. He would separate from her and from Jacques (in whom he divined an ally of his mother's weakness); he would live away from them with Loute. Accustomed to act in his corner, without any one paying any attention to what he did, and without a confidant, nothing was easier for him than to prepare secretly his petition for divorce, with the assistance of the attorney Ridou. He also put in order his money affairs, arranged that his presence at the factory should not be indispensable during several months, and, everything being well in order, having lived during these conspiracies an intense, active and happy period, he crowned this methodical work by carrying off his beloved daughter. Would he have gone to extremes if, by a disastrous mischance, Emmeline or Jacques had stood in front of him, barring his path? That is uncertain. Now, on the contrary, that the miles between Paris and the fugitives were increasing in number Corbellier took courage. It pleased him to imagine the consternation of Emmeline on her return that evening to the Rue Montaigne. He had not left even a word for her. He was sure that she would understand; sure, also, that she would not dare to take any steps on her own side. And the next day, at the time of the morning tea, she would receive a letter from the solicitor, Ridou, telling her that he was at her disposal to communicate to her the decisions of M. Corbellier. . . .

After Amiens, Loute, who up till then had played and chattered like a schoolgirl on her holidays, went to sleep against her father's shoulder. He kept her in that position for two hours, leaning against him motionless; not for a second did he stop delighting himself with this thought: "This is my daughter; she is mine; nobody shall take her from me." The sight of her straw-coloured hair, her little arched forehead spotted with freckles, her too-large ears, all her features clumsily designed, her thin and gawky body that could be detected under the dress of zephyr cloth—all these roused in him admiration and happiness. . . . And besides, Loute's ugliness was not disagreeable; healthy, vivacious, Loute had the ungainly and touching grace of the awkward age. "My little darling, my little girl," murmured Corbellier. And now he understood that he had believed himself to be happy, but that he had not been really happy, when long ago he took Emmeline, his young wife, on their honeymoon. He understood that only a love that is shared can bring happiness. . . . "My daughter, my darling, you are a little soul . . . all white . . . you will be a good woman, you will. . . ." In this way they arrived at Lille, where they dined at the buffet; it was an extravagant dinner, ordered to suit Loute's fantasy: chocolate, *foie gras*, a salad and cakes. . . . Then nearly two hours were still necessary to reach Rosendael. While going to the train for Rosendael with Loute, Corbellier bought in the station the *Echo du Nord*, which had just appeared and smelt of fresh ink. . . . He slipped it into his pocket and forgot about it; Loute, being in the humour for chatter, babbled on until their arrival at Rosendael. . . . There everything had been prepared

in advance—the carriage, the suite of rooms—one sitting-room, and two large bedrooms adjoining one another—in the best hotel. It was black night when the doors closed on their *tête-à-tête*. Loute, over-excited by the events of the day, declared that she was not sleepy, and wished that very night to go and salute the North Sea which they could hear, quite close, licking heavily the dunes of sand. Then suddenly her excitement subsided and she sat silent; her eyes blinked, and she was so tired that it was all Corbellier and a chambermaid could do to get her undressed and put to bed. As soon as she was in bed, she insisted on her father's sitting beside her and holding her hand until she fell asleep. Corbellier felt this feeble hand relax, and was going to his own room, when Loute opened her pale amber eyes again.

"Papa," she said (and her father did not know if she were speaking awake or asleep), "papa . . . M. Hanin will be sure to keep his little daughter with him, won't he?"

Corbellier did not understand at once, although he had heard talk about this Hanin affair, which was the subject of scandal in Paris, although he knew, too, that Ridou was the wife's solicitor. . . . He remembered Loute's rummaging through the brief in the library. . . . And as father and daughter really communed with each other by mysterious waves of sympathy, he *saw* his daughter's thought in the state of indefiniteness and trouble in which it clouded this childish brain and kept it from sleep. A wave of pity and adoration broke over his heart, and he seized in his arms the slight form in its pure white night-gown and pressed it against him, as he murmured—

"Yes, my darling! yes, my darling! Be easy!

They don't take little girls away from their Papa like that. And your own Papa would take you to the other end of the world rather than . . ."

But already Loute, reassured, was sleeping. He placed her head on the pillow, looked down on her for a few seconds more, and then, after switching off the electric light, returned to his own room at once so happy and so moved that he had no wish to sleep. He went to bed, however, and then got up again, as he remembered the *Echo du Nord* which he had slipped into his jacket pocket. He took it out; in huge headlines there sprawled across the head of the third page—

"LATEST: *Grave case of espionage at the Ministry of War. Resignation of the Under-Secretary of State for War.*"

A short dispatch from the Havas Agency, dated two o'clock in the afternoon, justified this heading without explaining it. In it, it was stated "that a military document of the very highest importance had been stolen about a fortnight ago from the private residence of the Under-Secretary; that this document having been insistently asked for by M. Berger, President of the Parliamentary Commission of Aviation, M. Jules Croze, after some attempts at evasion, had been compelled to confess its disappearance: he had that very morning sent in his resignation to the President of the Council, who had accepted it." There were no other details.

Corbellier had preserved that natural belief of feeble people in inherent justice, in a final "everything is paid for," which on certain days makes the inventory

and checks the accounts of every individual. He thought to himself: "There it is. . . . She and her accomplice are going to collapse at the same moment. . . . It is well. . . ."

In his turn, he turned out the lights in his room, and, pacified, was soon asleep.

* * * * *

The catastrophe that descended upon Jules Croze—compelled as he was by the insistence of a political enemy to reveal the theft of B. 2. 17, just when he was on the point of recovering the documents—had at least one happy result for him: his wife and daughter immediately returned to the house in the Avenue Velasquez. Madame Croze had resisted the entreaties of Baroness Ropart and Guy so long as it was a matter for her husband only of embarrassments with women and money; but she considered it ignoble to aggravate a disaster, which after all was quite out of proportion to the fault committed, by publicly deserting him at a time when a public grievance weighed on his shoulders. She returned to the Avenue Velasquez, and brought Josette with her, without demanding from her husband any promise to break with Emmeline. She even cut short with a dry gesture the protestations and oaths that he was beginning of his own accord. She made him understand that the confidence which had been broken between them would never more be restored. She had returned for no other reason than to defend the "domestic question" in regard to Croze: had not certain newspapers gone so far as to insinuate that the Under-Secretary might have been implicated in complicity with this espionage? Julie de Sauzon, Croze's wife, believed it to be her duty not to increase the peril which

threatened her name as wife and the name of her children.

Josette returned with her mother. She alone of the whole family was ignorant of certain precise details in the affair. They had naturally avoided talking, in her presence, about the peculiar circumstances under which the theft of the documents had been accomplished, circumstances that Croze had, in the end, been forced to confess to his wife. . . . With the imperious egotism of youth and love, Josette viewed the whole crisis only in its relation to the one fact that touched her: the abrupt departure of Letzling coinciding with the flight of Mag and Bolski, and, following that, the utter silence of the Count—not a word, not a reply to the despairing letters that she had ventured to write to him. When she returned to her own home, other consequences of the event—which also concerned her—commenced to make their appearance. They were publicly revealing the life of Magda Riemann. The newspapers, at first filled with extravagant details, in which Mag was represented as the wife, and then as the mistress, of a high German personage, ended by publishing a few facts. They directed their attention towards the Austrian Embassy. The absence of the military attaché was noted: an official communication, immediately published by the offices of the Rue de Varenne, declared that Count Adolf von Letzling was on regular leave. Josette wished to doubt still: "No, it was not possible, Adolf was not on leave; he was not free to answer her, to reassure her. . . ." None the less the circle of despair was narrowing around her. The Press had not yet spoken of the double suite of rooms. The Prefect Lehoux, gallant man that he

was, knew the risk to the reputation of a young girl that there would be in this divulgence, and was silent on the subject. But Josette divined how her secret was threatened, how precarious it was, since all the reporters were making inquiries about Bolski, and Bolski was the apparent tenant of the double suite.

She was wearing herself out. Her ordinary pallor became exaggerated; she was unable to sleep, and was becoming thin. Jules Croze, on the other hand, confident as to the final result of the crisis (the withholders of the document, being unable to speculate on scandal, since it had already broken out, were becoming more tractable, and the transaction was coming to a close)—Croze was regaining courage. With the audacity of a fortunate man, not too scrupulous, and but little sensitive to the delicate shades of esteem, he was beginning to hold his head up again and to speak boldly, announcing that in his turn he would take the offensive and confound and prosecute his detractors. It was he who, without being in the least aware of it, gave, one evening at the family dinner-table, the final blow to his daughter.

"Well," he exclaimed, as he took his place at the table, "we now hold all the threads of the plot, and the facts confirm the opinion that I have always held . . . the gentleman Letzling has, indeed, been the soul of the conspiracy. A pretty gentleman! When I think that they wanted to persuade me to give him Josette!"

In vain Guy, detecting his sister's grief—and considering it quite natural—tried to stop his father. Croze continued, under the coldly disinterested glance of his wife—

"I have just received a telephone message from

the *Matin* that one of their reporters has made an important discovery, namely, the rooms in which the two confederates met and combined their filthy little transactions, dissipation and spying mixed together. The concierge has told everything; it appears that there are names of society women to be revealed. A ground-floor with two entrances—Rue St. Lazare and Rue Châteaudun. . . . What is the matter with you, Josette?"

The young girl left the table, followed by Guy, who flung at his father as he passed him: "Really, Papa, you are too cruel. . . ." Madame Croze accompanied her children, and Croze found himself alone and bewildered before his plate. "What!" he thought; "she loves him still?" He considered the persistence of this sentiment almost offensive to himself. Was not Letzling the cause of all his troubles? And when Madame Croze and Guy took their places again at the table, after leaving Josette in her room (she had a headache, she said, and wished to rest), Guy had some difficulty in making him understand that Josette's emotion was perfectly explicable; that Josette had at one time looked upon Letzling as her future husband; that she had given him her confidence; and that it was terrible for her to realize that she had been dealing with a traitor.

In the meantime, Josette, in her own room, was sitting beside the window without moving. She felt that something had been decided in her brain and in her heart at the moment that Croze had spoken. But it seemed to her that in the meantime her heart was no longer beating, and that her brain had become an inert mass congealed around the one solitary thought, the dreadful decision. She remained like this for a

long time; long enough for her mother and then her brother, dinner being over, to come and ask after her and find her still seated on the same chair beside the window. She told them that her headache seemed to be easier, and that the best thing for her was to remain there without speaking or hearing anybody speak. Neither Guy nor Madame Croze felt any anxiety. Madame Croze merely said: "You ought to lie down and try to sleep." "Yes," answered Josette, "I'm going to rest. You won't let anybody disturb me any more, will you, Mama?" This time her door was bolted, but she returned to sit in the same place. The July twilight was prolonged in rosy light. Josette closed the window, as though to remain more alone with her thoughts. The decision became fixed in her mind, the funereal veil which during these last days appeared to her at intervals, covering the horizon around her, she saw it now, she felt it so close to her that she could touch it.

"To die. . . ."

She ventured to pronounce the word, not quite aloud, but yet articulated in the silence of her room so that it was perceptible to her own ears.

"To die. . . ." It was that, it was that terrible resolution which was shaping itself in her from day to day, without her wishing to dwell upon it. While battling against the gloomy suggestion, she knew then only too well that she must yield to it on the day on which the unworthiness of Letzling should be established for her. . . . Now, to-night, the unworthiness of Letzling appeared even more absolute than she had suspected. . . . "Espionage and dissipation. . . . The names of society women are coming out into the daylight." And among these

names her own, young girl as she was, was going "to come out into the daylight," too; doubtless the eyes of her mother would read it in the newspapers, and the eyes of Guy, and the eyes of all the people she knew, and the eyes of ironical crowds, eager for scandal. . . .

"I wish to die."

Oh yes . . . the decision to die had for a long time dwelt in her mind, not only in principle, but almost to its very details of execution. Up till then she had resisted when the funereal idea attacked her; but the idea continued traitorously to work in her, constructing the project with infallible diligence, crystallizing accessory resolutions around that phrase of Guy's that Croze had not been the only one to hear and keep in mind: "Swallow a good dose of chloral, turn on the gas, and lie down. . . ." Josette was now establishing the crystallization that had been instinctively operating around the suggestion. Since her return to the Avenue Velasquez she had not once seated herself on the couch in the bathroom without thinking at the back of her mind: "One has only to turn on the gas." Not once had she entered Guy's laboratory without her glance resting on a certain brown phial, with the words "Chloral 10%" traced on its white label by Guy's own hand. But while this obscure work was going on inside her, she did not confess it to herself, like a kindly warder, who would avert his eyes so as not to disturb his prisoner's slow preparations for escape. Now she perceived, with a mingling of horror and pride, that all was well, and, in fact, ready for escape; there was wanting only the final decision.

Nobody, as she had wished, disturbed her in her

sad meditation; nobody knocked at her door. At nightfall, however, she heard footsteps, the footsteps of two women approaching the door together. There was a sound of whispering; it was her mother and the chambermaid. Both listened for some little time; Josette caught the words that they uttered. "She is asleep," said Madame Croze; "don't let us wake her, poor little one. . . ." And the maid answered: "Mademoiselle has turned out all the lights. . . . Mademoiselle has gone to bed, for certain. . . ." But Madame Croze seemed unable to make up her mind to leave the landing, and, perceiving this hesitation, Josette's heart began to beat violently, as though excited by a fluttering of the will to live. She knew that if her mother were to knock at her door at this moment she would run to open it, she would throw herself into her arms, she would cry out to her: "Mama, don't let me do it. . . . Mama, don't leave me. . . . Don't let me die. . . ." The whispering continued behind the door; then very gently, on tiptoe, Madame Croze and the servant went away.

Josette had not stirred from the arm-chair where she had been sitting; the sudden emotion that she had experienced left her so overwhelmed that she could not even resume the thread of her dark thoughts. . . . A torpor that was nearer to fainting than to sleep came over her. . . . And while her consciousness of living fell away, she still kept enough of it to wish: "Ah, that it may be for ever . . . for ever. . . ."

* * * * *

Now, during this July evening, almost at the same time that Jules Croze had given, without suspecting it, a mortal blow to his daughter by his careless phrase: "Dissipation and spying mixed together . . .

names of society women are coming out into the daylight . . ." one of those long and sinuous satellites, launched upon iron trajectories, by the industry of man, which day and night gravitate across the surface of the earth, carrying from meridian to meridian living beings, the objects used by these living beings in order to live, and also, impressed upon pages and sealed by seals, wandering human thought—a satellite at once faster and more luxurious than the rest, which is called the Orient Express, having left Constantinople the evening before, having passed Adrianople, Sofia, Belgrade, Bucharest, Budapest, Vienna, Munich, was now nearing, as it devoured the rails beneath the magnificent firmament, the first buttresses of the Swiss Alps. In this luxurious satellite there was the usual contingent of privileged inhabitants, rich men and perfumed women; there was the sumptuous luggage of these men and women; there was a restaurant, well lit and decorated with flowers. There was also the more austere compartment, almost like a cellular carriage, in which are imprisoned the sealed and hidden human thoughts while it journeys. . . . Two employees were in possession of this rolling prison. One was asleep on his chair, after a Germanic supper washed down with beer; he was sleeping sprawling over the table, on which was a heap of letters which a half-open mail-bag allowed to trickle out with the joltings of the train. The other, on the contrary, arranged methodically the postal harvest stored since Vienna. And as he was an employee who read the newspapers, who was interested in international politics, and who knew the names of French ministers, he turned over again and again between his fingers, before throwing it into the bag labelled

"*Paris und weiter*," a yellow envelope, carefully sealed, which bore the address—

"Mademoiselle Josette Croze,
"35 Avenue Velasquez,
"Paris."

It bore the postmark "Heigraf"; but this name meant nothing to the employee. All the same, he asked himself for a second or two if he should not keep back the letter before passing the German frontier. Croze. . . . A case of espionage in France. . . . The Austrian Embassy dragged into the case in the French newspapers. . . . "Bah! Let them manage it themselves," he thought. . . . And, not particularly anxious for extra work, he threw the letter into the *Paris und weiter* mail-bag.

"Heigraf, July 29"

"MY BELOVED JOSETTE,

"At last, for the first time since I left Paris, I am able to write to you with the hope of the letter reaching you. My sister, the Marquise de Sudrös, who has come to see me in my prison, has, in pity for my agony, been kind enough to undertake to post my letter. For, my Josette, I am in prison: a sumptuous prison, in a delightful country, with an excellent table and many servants; a prison, the governor of which reminds me every day 'that it has been honoured by princely presences'—but a formidable prison for all that, surrounded by moats full of water, and with its doors guarded by sentinels with loaded rifles. This is called for me and for this special case 'rigorous imprisonment.' Ordinarily an officer endures it in his own domicile, but they have assigned to me as my place of imprisonment the fortress of

Heigraf. And this has been going on for thirty-seven days, without my being permitted to receive any one at all, except my military chief and the members of my family. . . . And that, as the governor tells me every day, is an exceptional favour, due to the fact that I am the nephew of the Minister of War, and am connected with the Imperial family. They have held me responsible in high places, if not for the affair of the documents stolen at your father's house, at least for the fact that the Austro-Hungarian Embassy was compromised in the matter. They took advantage of the fact that, at the earliest moment, I came loyally to see my uncle, the Minister; the flight of Mag and Bolski, in conjunction with certain words that I had caught between them, left me scarcely any doubt; I guessed the work of the two scoundrels; I was appalled at the idea that they would injure you through this, and especially (you understand) by the idea that in the eyes of the crowd I risked being taken for their accomplice. . . . Who could give me better advice as to how to defend my honour than my supreme chief, my mother's brother? I rushed post-haste to him; I told him everything—our love, Josette, as well as my distress. . . . Ah, my darling! I have seen many general officers in a rage in my life . . . but anger like that of my uncle, the Minister, no, I have never seen it.* He treated me as a foolhardy madman, and told me that I was unworthy of my captain's galloons . . . and when I protested and said that I intended to start back for Paris at once, there came a brutal refusal and rigorous imprisonment. . . . And for thirty-seven days now I have been living in the fortress of Heigraf, and they have been bringing me insignificant letters and suppressing those that I

send away. All this may seem outrageous to Josette Croze, daughter of an Under Secretary of the easy-going French Republic. But all the same that is the way things go in the Apostolic Monarchy, right in the twentieth century, if not for the common people, at all events for privileged people like myself, whose family is more or less in politics or at the Court.

"Fortunately, this terrible family includes an exquisite and sensitive woman, my sister, de Sudrös. She has not been able to come and see me before to-day, but she now gives me reassuring news about the affair of the documents, and she knows from a reliable source that your father has been able to treat with the two bandits. She has taken pity on my distress, and she is taking an interest in our love; she dares (an act that she rightly considers heroic) to take charge of a letter for you. . . . That is why I can hope that these lines that I am tracing in haste will at last reach you. . . . My sister is close to me, waiting and watching to avoid my being caught in the act of writing! You have had no doubt of me, have you, Josette? As for me, I have not received a single letter from you, no sign, but I have ceaselessly felt your thoughts and your tenderness around me; and was I not to be even more pitied than you, deprived as I was of news, and knowing that they would try to blacken me in your eyes? But that you could believe me an accomplice of Bolski, Josette, you to whom I have spoken soul to soul, you who know me, you who know that my life belongs to you, and that family, fortune, are nothing to me, if they separate me from you. . . . no! That you could have for a single moment, even with all appearances against me, have judged me a traitor, not for a second have I feared that.

"My love, my fiancée, my wife, time presses, and my sister is tormenting me, she is right. We might be surprised, and then this letter would have the fate that all the others that I addressed to you have probably had. I have a feeling that the end of our troubles is near, that they are going to restore my liberty, and that I am coming back to you. Listen to me carefully: nothing from henceforth shall keep me from being your husband, if you consent to it. I would rather never return to my own country, rather disappear with the wife that I have chosen, as one of our Archdukes did not long ago. (Ah! how I understand him!) Josette, my wish is to see you again and never more to leave you. To see you again! Is it possible? May it not be long in coming, for I am at the end of my endurance. . . . You will scarcely recognize me; I have grown thin; I have some white hairs above the temples. And you? And you? You, too, have suffered. Oh! forgive me. I am yours for life, and I love you, my own dear fiancée, my wife.

"ADOLF DE LETZLING."

About an hour after midnight Josette woke up in the corner by the window of her room, in the arm-chair where she had been sleeping for a long time. At once she remembered the footsteps of her mother and the maid, the whisperings behind the door, and the convulsive emotion that she had felt, so violent that it had been followed by a long prostration.

"Now everything is utterly finished," she said to herself. She felt singularly clear-minded; her brain swept like a threshing-floor by a gust of wind, clear of thoughts, except one: the one which for weeks

pointed to the sombre horizon, and which was now there, in the place, in possession of the centre of her whole world, dominating everything.

She rose to her feet and listened; there was not a sound in the house. There was not a sound from outside. One might have said that there was no sound in Paris, and that she alone was living in the lethargic city. She glanced at the watch strapped to her wrist. . . . "Ten minutes past one? everybody is asleep. . . ." Then she unhooked her dress, which fell on the carpet like another little skin. She picked it up, finished undressing as though for the night, and slipped a blue silk Japanese kimono, relieved by red embroidery, over her night-dress. Then she placed herself in front of the writing-table, a narrow eighteenth-century table of speckled rosewood. From the drawer she took a thin package of letters which she began to burn one by one in the grate without re-reading them. . . . The flames, as they reached each new supply of fuel, discharged into this hot night an intolerable heat. Forced to turn her face away, Josette suddenly caught sight of herself in a mirror facing her: blue and red with the reflection of the fire on her face, her arms, her hair. "I am pretty to-night," she thought. She experienced a brief anguish of heart in the shock of these two ideas: that she was pretty and that she must die. But immediately the horror of continuing to live carried her away, and made her throw with more determined gestures into the flames, now dying out and now reviving, the last papers to be destroyed: Letzling's letters and her own letters which Mercadier had returned to her at Val d'Anay. She discovered that she suffered neither physically nor morally in destroying this evidence of the past. The

painful place that recently used to bleed in her heart whenever she thought of Letzling was to-night, as it were, scarred and inert.

"Come! Now for the brown phial. I ought to have provided myself with it before. Supposing they hear me going downstairs? Bah! I shall say that I was unable to sleep, and that I thought of chloral. . . . It isn't the first time that I have taken it. And besides, they won't hear me."

And, indeed, she accomplished her expedition to her brother's laboratory with the sureness and cautious silence of a somnambulist; it took less than five minutes. When she returned to her room she thought for a moment, standing with the brown phial in her hand. No doubt, no hesitation, assailed her in regard to what she was going to do. She merely examined herself as at the moment of departure for a journey; she asked herself if she had left everything in order behind her.

"A letter to Mama? . . . A letter to Guy? . . ."

No, she would write nothing. She would slip out of life discreetly; and in this way doubt would hover over her departure. Suicide or accident: with a little good-will they might be doubtful about it. She half smiled as she thought that they would end by persuading themselves that it had been an accident.

"But Mama is very fond of me, and Guy especially. My dear Guy! . . . He ought never to have left me. And I ought never to have concealed anything from him; he will be very sorry. . . ."

Her mental picture of Guy softened her; she had to force her thoughts away from it. . . . "I must, I must . . ." she murmured aloud. She turned off the lights in her bedroom and went into the next room,

the dressing-room where the bath was. She made herself half a glass of eat sucrée, poured two spoonfuls of chloral into it, and drank the mixture. She had already proved that a dose of half the strength was sufficient to send her to sleep in a quarter of an hour. . . . She had only to turn on the gas-tap of the geyser and stretch herself out on the couch. But every night before going to bed she was accustomed to kneel before this same couch for a little prayer. She knelt down as usual. This time the chloral seemed to have scarcely any effect on her. She felt wide awake. She prayed. It was a contradictory prayer; and yet how many suicides have addressed a like appeal to the "Sovereign Judge at the very moment when they were going to transgress His law! A strange prayer in which the divine Intelligence is entreated at the same time as the divine Pity, in which the dying person says to God: "*My God, you know well* that I cannot go on living! My God, it is not possible that you should condemn me, for I have not received from *you* sufficient force to continue the struggle, and *you* know that." Josette was by no means an unbeliever, but she practised, with nothing more than cold piety, that politeness towards God which is sufficient for the majority of well-born women of her generation. Kneeling before this couch, on which, so soon, she was going to stretch herself out to die, the work of death already beginning in her, she made this night her first ardent prayer. For the first time she was in real communication with the Dispensator. She exposed before Him the despairing misery of her soul; she accepted Him as Arbiter: "Can I live, my God? Isn't it better for my parents and for me that I should escape?" And she said

again to God: "My God, I do not seek to fly from your dominion. On the contrary, I seek to escape *to you*, and you know it. Ah, receive me!"

When she rose to her feet her resolution was more firmly fixed than ever. Still the chloral refused to act. Resolutely she emptied the brown phial into what was left of the eau sucrée. Then she shut herself up in the dressing-room, turned on fully the gas-tap, swallowed the contents of the glass, and stretched herself out on the couch. She now experienced a minute of poignant lucidity: she saw Letzling again as though he were present beside her. She, who all through this evening had refused to think of him, now evoked him with pleasure; she recalled the chaste caresses that they had exchanged. . . . The shiver of happiness and hope that electrified her when near him shook her nerves. "Can he have committed this crime?" she thought. But already a torpor engulfed her, and she closed her eyes. Across the trammels of sleep that came to her she caught the light hissing of the gas through the orifice of the burners.

. . . Yonder, yonder, on the borders of Germany and Switzerland, the sinuous satellite was still hurrying along, its population now asleep. And the letter with the postmark "Heigraf," nestling in the mail-bag of *Paris und weiter* through tunnels, viaducts, embankments and cuttings, was ceaselessly nearing France. But Josette, stretched out slender and rigid as a little Egyptian, was going to death through sleep. At first it was, under the influence of the chloral, an utter prostration, a capsizing in inscrutable darkness. . . . Then (after how many minutes or hours?) the network of sleep relaxed and allowed to filter through

not yet thought, but sensation. Josette was ill. . . . She suffered in her body as if there were a weight on her breast and on her stomach, and also as though a ligature were being pressed around her neck, her temples, her wrists, her knees. She wished to move—it seemed to her that she was moving to save herself—to escape; but she was well bound down, and her efforts ended only in bringing her nearer to waking. She arrived at that degree of consciousness in which, during a nightmare, one struggles against agony so desperately that usually one ends by breaking through sleep and flying back to life. Josette struggled, Josette groaned; Josette had a horror of death; Josette wished passionately to live. . . . But nothing could prevail against the decision that she herself had taken: the efforts of her young muscles, stiffened suddenly by terror of nothingness, ended only in furtive starts of her feet and hands. The loud cries that she wished to utter were vague groanings that aroused no echo in the sleeping house.

She herself ceased to be conscious of her own nightmare. Sleep and death, after this short conflict, agreed to distend her limbs, slacken her heart and check the course of her blood. . . . She was calm again. Gently soothed, she glided towards the black abyss where it is man's inexpressible agony to ask himself if there reigns an eternal forgetfulness or the dreaded unknown of an awakening.

CHAPTER IV

THE JUSTICIARY

MAN may escape from life but not from time; inflexible time pursues him who has escaped from his prison, and the dead man, like the living, remains in subjection to the succession of days and years. . . . On Josette's tomb the roses, geraniums and begonias of summer had been followed, according to the course of the months, by plumed crysanthemums and then by Christmas roses. And now, above the stone cell that shut in the little virginal victim of other people's passions, it was the arid season in which only the leaves of prickwood, boxwood and mahonias attest and symbolize human faith in the persistence of life. A dismal February was hovering over Paris and made its ill-humours circulate around the gardens of the dead. Sometimes snow covered everything, clothing with a uniform shroud both the forgotten tombs that are so mournful, and are as though dead in their turn, and the best-cared-for graves—Josette's, for example, where sometimes icy flakes made a velvety whiteness of the mimosas and carnations that were piously sent from the Riviera by Guy Croze.

Guy Croze, among other characteristics of the new generation in France, united a quick sensibility to a definite sense of reality. No son could have suffered more than he did from the family ruin brought about by the follies of his father; no brother could have

wept more bitterly over the tragic death of his sister. He had, however, taken care that his marriage with Yvonne should be carried out with as little delay as possible; because the family of yesterday was shaking on its foundations, that was no reason for retarding the foundation of the family of to-morrow; because a beloved sister had deserted life, that was no reason for not drawing to one's heart the young and well-loved wife. . . . He had only waited until equilibrium was a little more firmly established around him. The affair of the stolen documents was solved by a bleeding of two hundred thousand francs shed by Croze on the couple, Bolski and Mag. By this means scandal had stopped short, but the political position of the deputy of Romorantin was none the less destroyed. His domestic life existed 'only on the outside; Emmeline Corbellier, now divorced, clung to him more tightly than ever. Madame Croze allowed him to do what he liked with indifference; all affection for her guilty husband was destroyed in her. Besides, her daughter's tragic adventure had been a blow to her heart, and she lived in devotion and charity and more often than not at Val d'Anay with her sister, Blanche, the half-widow. On the other hand, old Haumont-Segré, whom his wife's death and his daughter's desertion had at first plunged into a prostration that caused fear for his sanity, was re-establishing himself, as though by a miracle, and showing in the settlement of the out-standing difficulties of his bankruptcy an activity and an ingenuity worthy of the period when he was considered one of the foremost financiers of the time. * He had undertaken the task of clearing himself absolutely of the stigma of fraud: on this he employed his small

inheritance from his wife and lived himself in a modest pension in the Rue Galilée. Thus, on either side there was re-established, if not order at least tranquillity in Yvonne's family, as in Guy's. And so Guy and Yvonne were married in the early days of the New Year in a strict privacy that was justified by their double mourning. Then, as soon as they were married, flying from Paris and the places that fashionable Parisians frequent in winter, they had found the desired sanctuary which they were looking for in the little cove of Cornouilles, the latest-born of that pleiad of favoured stations which rise gradually between the red rocks, the green pines and the blue sea from Saint-Raphaël to Cannes. Cornouilles as yet consists of some ten brand-new villas nestling among the pines that descend down to the edge of the road which overhangs the sea. The old village lies less than half a mile away in the narrow valley of a neighbouring torrent, le Guerre.

The young Crozes had taken at Cornouilles a white cottage named the "Mimosas" near another larger cottage named the "Tamarisks," which belonged to the same proprietor, and which was also to let. Yvonne and Guy had preferred the "Mimosas" merely because it was the smaller of the two cottages, and because they were at that charming period when it seems that one can never be pressed close enough against the other. . . . Besides, they meant to receive nobody except Yvonne's mother, whose coming had been announced. Their servants consisted of a couple of country folk. They did not frequent the brilliant places along the coast. Once only, having gone as far as Nice, they had returned troubled after meeting some of those ill-advised friends, who never fail to give

you bad news: they had learnt that their cousin Berthe, with Fanny Smith, was living in a villa at Cannes between Nice and Antibes, and also that Sandra Ceroni was to be seen at Nice with a widower of fifty, provided with a little boy of eight, whose governess she was supposed to be. The widower of fifty, a rather rich German, was going to marry Sandra, they said. Certainly, the fact that Berthe was living in the neighbourhood in no way moved Guy, who was very much in love with this young wife, nor Yvonne, who was very sure of her husband. And the fact that Sandra Ceroni had at last found some one to marry her, mattered little to either of them. But these names, these vicinities, brought back the recollection of adventures and painful hours and all the disorder that these wandering foreigners had created around them, the consequences of which they were still enduring, and from which they were not certain of being definitely protected in the future. So after this unlucky expedition into too populous districts the Crozes invariably made their excursions on the sea or on the mountains.

One morning towards the end of February, on the wooden loggia of their sparkling cottage, Guy and Yvonne were taking their early breakfast together. They took it sitting side by side, their hands instinctively meeting when they were not talking. The few passers-by on the road who perceived them had no need of making inquiries to recognize that this white morning dress, decked with black muslin, and these pyjamas in black and white checks were still at the delightful and agonizing period when two newly-wedded people are positively unable to keep away from each other, when the need of each

other's presence is equal to that of breathing the air, when all the senses seem to have this one reason for existence and this one function : to help each of them in the perception and knowledge of the other. Between Yvonne, radiantly beautiful, and Guy, refined by the sorrows of the last month—Guy slighter in figure and with his features more firmly marked—there reigned that eager curiosity of all young couples in love. But there was something more which made their hands seek each other, which brought their chairs closer together, which held one in the glance of the other : a kind of fear that Destiny might still be lying in wait for them, might be preparing in the shadow some new eruption after so many others, some supreme attack which would quite overthrow them, if it struck them apart from one another, but which they would certainly repulse if they fronted it side by side with linked hands.

The little cove was streaming with sunlight over an indigo sea, agitated by definite and determined wavelets, although no wind was perceptible. The sun for the last few days was gaining warmth. The little sloping garden, simply designed with steps and rock-work, the little garden in which an architect's geometrical imagination showed itself, descended through the slope of the pine-trees that had been roused, after long weeks of torpor, by the approach of real spring. Primroses and a few roses drank in the dazzling light ; two mimosas, like two censers, exhaled so strong a perfume that one imagined at moments that one could distinguish the smoke through the motionless air. Before this landscape of tranquil hope Yvonne and Guy examined the contents of the post which had just been brought to them. Yvonne

was finishing a letter from her mother, when her husband drew her to him to show her a paragraph in the newspaper that he had unfolded. And this was a chance for Yvonne to press her cheek to her husband's and put her arm round his neck. The newspaper said, in the *Echoes of Society*—

"Madame Emmeline Corbellier has resumed her poetical Thursdays, which are attended so eagerly by people well known in Parisian society. Yesterday evening they applauded at her house a dialogue poem, entitled, *Narcissus and his Reflection*, played by Mlle. Langlade of the Odéon (in the part of Narcissus), and Fervolles of the Comédie-Royale (in the part of the Reflection), author, M. Jacques Corbellier. This delightfully clever poem, a perverse offshoot of poetical comedy, was heartily welcomed. It will certainly be produced soon at one of our large theatres."

"What unconsciousness!" murmured Yvonne. "This stupid woman who had the chance of being divorced without a scandal, thanks to the complacency of the husband, cannot then allow herself to be forgotten?"

Guy made a gesture of resignation.

"What does your mother say?" he asked.

"She hopes to arrive the day after to-morrow. Alice's sore throat is well."

"And Nanie?"

"Nanie is going through the conventional engagement with M. Lecœur. She has already persuaded him not to wear any more ready-made ties, and she has sent him her manicurist."

"Is there anything about Uncle Haumont-Segré?"

"Yes, Mama saw him the day before yesterday . . . or rather" (she looked at the letter) "four days ago

in his room in the Rue Galilée. He seemed in good health. He was working at the accounts with a certain Vignal, an old accountant of his bank. For the rest, this is what Mother says"—

She read the passage aloud—

"... I find his fever of activity rather alarming. He is undertaking, he tells us, to divide his fortune among his creditors, in proportion to the amounts he owes them. Everything that my sister-in-law has left him will go in that way. He does not seem to be concerned as to how he will live afterwards; he assures us that they are keeping a place for him in a bank in the south. . . . One would say that there are only two ideas in his head: hatred for Berthe for having allowed her mother to die without paying her a visit before, and without a word of compassion afterwards, and his desire to compel the respect of those whom his collapse has injured. In addition to this, I can state with pleasure that his health is good; he is just as much the 'old Hercules' as ever."

As Yvonne finished reading these words, her attention, at the same time as her husband's, was distracted by the passing along the road of a long grey motor, built like a double phaeton; two solitary women occupied the large seats at the back. Not a few grey motors passed on the road from Saint-Raphaël at the foot of the sloping garden, but this one had suddenly slowed down on approaching Cornouilles. Now it had stopped altogether; one of the two travellers, leaning forward, was talking to the chauffeur; the other, standing with her face towards the incline, where the bright habitations rose in tiers, seemed to admire this discreet recess of the coast, and to feel the temptation that sometimes catches tourists at a turn of the road

to suspend their circuit, to stay and settle down. These two travellers, indeed, could not have come from very far. Their dresses were scarcely ruffled by the wind during their drive. Both, veiled, enveloped in large clinging cloaks, presented that mysterious and carnival-like appearance of modern women in motor-cars, about whom one can only conjecture as to whether they are young or old, ugly or pretty. They were probably young, especially the one who was talking to the chauffeur; they were certainly elegant and fashionable.

Yvonne and Guy looked at each other: they had been seized with the same idea, and as they hesitated about admitting it, Guy murmured—

“What can *they* be doing here?”

“Ah!” cried Yvonne, as she watched the taller of the two women who had alighted on the road and was now aiding the other to descend, “there’s no doubt about it. It’s the Englishwoman. . . . Oh, Guy! what do they want with us?”

She treasured no retrospective jealousy against the fact that her husband had formerly been in love with Berthe. And she would not have been a woman if she had retained any spite against Fanny Smith, against Fanny Smith who had helped to separate Guy from Berthe, but the appearance of the two unexpected travellers aroused in her that painful sense of fatality which she had been unable to shake off after so many misfortunes.

Guy reassured her.

“In the first place, it isn’t certain that it is they. And then, look, they are not coming to us.”

As a matter of fact, the two travellers left their car standing on the road and began to ascend the hill,

not towards the entrance to the "Mimosas," but towards that of the neighbouring "Tamarisks," which a sign-board on the garden gate pointed out to passers-by, at the same time specifying that the house was to let. The taller of the two women entered first; the other followed; the few steps that they had taken in the sun had made them hot, and they took off their veils and unfastened their cloaks a little.

"It is they," said Yvonne.

Guy clasped her and pressed her to him without answering. Concealed behind the latticework of the fence which formed the side of the loggia, they saw Berthe and Fanny pass almost at their feet in the garden next to theirs. Then they disappeared under the pines towards the house of the "Tamarisks," which Yvonne and Guy could not see.

"How thin Berthe has got," said Yvonne.

"Yes. . . . One would say that she was ill. On the other hand, the d—d Englishwoman is still just the same."

"I hope to goodness they are not going to settle down in the 'Tamarisks.'"

"We should always be able to leave the place to them."

They continued on the look-out.

"Don't leave me," murmured Yvonne.

And Guy answered—

"No . . . not until they have gone away. . . ."

More than a quarter of an hour went by before the Englishwoman and her pupil reappeared, accompanied by a little woman, brown and bony, who was entrusted with the care of the "Tamarisks." They were walking more slowly, although the path was down-hill. Berthe, doubtless tired by these few steps, was leaning

on Fanny's arm. Fanny was having a discussion with the caretaker. All three passed quite near the loggia without looking round. It was only just as they passed the gate opening on to the road that the three women simultaneously raised their eyes towards the glittering façade of the "Mimosas." Guy and Yvonne, invisible behind the latticework, divined that their names were being mentioned.

They perceived the surprise that it produced in Berthe's face and in Fanny's; they noted the abruptness with which Fanny suddenly left the astonished caretaker, took Berthe's arm and in less than two minutes had brought her back to the car, had entered it with her, and had gone away.

"Pleasant journey to you," said Yvonne, venturing for the first time to lean out from the loggia, and, like a school-girl, waving her handkerchief after the motor, which was nothing more than a flying ball of dust on the rim of the blue coast.

Both went back into the villa. Yvonne, drawing herself up before a looking-glass, her hands joined together behind her neck, in an attitude that was a favourite one of hers, and which Guy called "playing the pigeon," murmured—

"My poor Guy, I have no remorse for having taken you away from my cousin; you who are so fond of my arms and neck and shoulders, what would you do with that bundle of bones?"

"Poor little Berthe," muttered Guy.

But the "pigeon," who knew her own power, continued to tempt him wilfully, knowingly. They threw themselves into each other's arms, forgetting at once fear and pity in the triumphant egoism of happy lovers.

Less than a week after the visit that his sister-in-law Haumont-Manin had paid him, the visit which Yvonne and Guy had read about together, old Haumont-Segré sent away the accountant Vignal, who had helped him to distribute his inheritance from his wife among the creditors of the bank that had failed. Later on, the accountant stated that he had felt moved on taking leave of him.

"I said to the master: 'How is Monsieur going to live now?' and he replied: 'Don't be uneasy about me, Vignal; my brother won't let me want for anything. . . . And besides, they are offering me a place in a fine little bank in Marseilles.' . . ."

Later on, too, Professor Haumont-Manin and the proprietress of the pension confirmed Vignal's story about this position promised in Marseilles.

"An old correspondent of mine," Haumont-Segré had said, "who has kept his belief in me, and who does not think that I am altogether an idiot . . . five thousand francs a year: a thousand more than is necessary for me. . . ."

And so the proprietress of the pension in the Rue Galilée experienced no surprise when her lodger came down to settle his account and announced, with a valise in his hand, that he was starting for the south.

"A little sooner than I expected; my correspondent has a great deal of extra work, and begs me to come a little earlier. Besides, I have nothing more to do here."

"And I hope that M. Haumont-Segré will have better weather down there than in Paris," concluded his hostess, as she handed him his receipted bill. "Does Monsieur wish me to send for a cab?"

"My word, no! The Métro is two steps from here, and it takes me right to the station."

He went off like this, carrying his valise, walking resolutely. The weight of his snowy head seemed to drag the shoulders a little forward, but his appearance was robust and his gait firm; an old oak twisted at the summit, but still sound right through.

He felt himself, indeed, full of vigour and resolution. His inveterate habit of scarcely ever showing excitement in voice or gestures, the kind and gentle appearance of his whole personality, concealed his inner fermentation from the eyes of the indifferent world. The Haumont-Manins alone had felt some uneasiness about it; but a little fever in the eyes, was it not perfectly natural in an old man who had been struck by such misfortunes one after the other: the desertion of his daughter, the ruin of his house, the death of his wife? Must he not have had, on the contrary, a brain splendidly balanced to have resisted so many shocks without showing now the slightest sign of weakness or folly? And certainly, no more than the Haumont-Manins, no more than the accountant Vignal, no more than the proprietress in the Rue Galilée, did the travellers who, between Paris and the Mediterranean, had for companion this white-haired, courteous old man, preferring to be silent, but replying with assiduous urbanity to any questions asked him, suspect that he was not going peacefully, as he said he was, to the place where his business called him.

Old Haumont-Segré, however, had concealed his real projects, and Marseilles was not the last point of his journey. Nobody thought about it, for nobody knew him in the huge noisy city, where he only

stayed long enough to take a glass of milk in a café near the station, while he consulted a local guide-book. Less than an hour after his arrival he returned to the station and entered an express train which ran along the coast between Marseilles and Nice. They had handed him a second-class ticket for Cagnes.

This particular morning the coast really resembled the posters with which the advertising agencies deck the walls of our towns, so as to rouse in the souls of the people of the north an irresistible need of blue sea and golden sun. . . . The golden sun had only sunk into the blue sea a few times since that other morning when Berthe and Fanny had paid their visit to the "Tamarisks," and yet it was already another golden sun and another blue sea. The Bacchic spring of the Riviera, which was then only announcing itself, had since made its mad and triumphant entrance. It was bursting forth from inanimate things and living beings, from stones and trees, from the earth and the flowers, from the air and the light, luring the world, luring everybody into an orgy of youthful life almost too passionate for human senses. On some mornings on the azure coast one rises filled with eagerness to inhale the glittering atmosphere, to breathe the breath of the gardens, to intoxicate oneself with the aroma and with the reflected light from the waves, when, after taking a few steps out-of-doors, one is overwhelmed by a sudden torpor, and one returns to seek the shade of the houses that are still cool, so as to sleep off there in the silence and semi-darkness an almost painful intoxication.

In the woods of Cagnes, in a remote corner, almost deserted and hard enough to get at, where their

Swiss cottage, the "Hut," was concealed, Berthe and Fanny had felt, on awaking, this appeal of a splendid day, the precursor of spring. They had been eager to go out and reach the strand. They had walked there together, happy in their solitude, happy in the ardent joy that the world seemed to exhale around them. . . . Fanny saw with delight Berthe's cheeks becoming rosy, her slight figure straightening itself, a less spiritless glance animating her pale eyes. Berthe's health was a source of uneasiness to Fanny. Berthe never complained, and Fanny was much too proud to accuse herself of the actual physical depression of her pupil. But without a doubt this depression had begun the day following the flight from her father's house; it had increased after the death of Madame Haumont-Segré, whom Fanny had not permitted Berthe to see again, compelling her to choose between her mother and herself. . . . Berthe had obeyed: she was a slave, and she loved her slavery; but for all that she had suffered. She was not getting better. As in her mother's case, the doctors did not discover in her any injured organ. They said, "Extreme anæmia," and they amused their ignorance by analyzing drops of this poor pale blood, by measuring the activity of these relapsed arteries.

Very quickly, in the air of the strand, the exuberance of spring, which at first had over-excited the young girl, overpowered her. It was necessary to return to the house, and Berthe had difficulty in reaching it, in spite of the help of Fanny, who supported her on her arm. Once back in her room, she collapsed into an arm-chair; this boisterous morning had overwhelmed her; she wished the windows to be closed and the blinds pulled down.

Fanny installed herself in the room, anxious and silent; no hospital nurse could have been more devoted, more indefatigable, and Berthe derived from this presence, at once authoritative and tender, a real comfort. "*Sleep, poor little thing, I want you to sleep.*" . . . But in spite of her obedient efforts to close her eyes and stop thinking, Berthe could not sleep. On the veil of her eyelids fire-reels were passing, all the radiance of the zebra-striped flashing sea. . . . However, even without sleep, the rest and the semi-darkness tended to soothe her.

"You have no fever, my dear one," said the Englishwoman, after holding the thin wrist between her fingers for some time. .

Suddenly Berthe sat straight up. "Who is walking in the garden?" she asked in an uneasy voice.

"Oh, Justine, I suppose. . . ."

"It isn't Justine. It's a man's step."

Berthe, naturally very timid and more timid as she grew weaker, could not get accustomed to the isolation of the "Hut," buried away in this huge wood at the end of an unfinished road which the motor was not able to follow even as far as the door. In front of the villa, it is true, one's eyes were reassured by perceiving across the trees the roofs of isolated houses and after them the maritime village of Cagnes quite near; but at the back was a rather dense thicket, broken only by pathways and covering a large part of the hill. Berthe said that she felt herself constantly watched and menaced by these dense thickets that overhung the chimney-tops of the "Hut." . . . She wished to leave Cagnes, and it was on a drive of inquiries in the neighbourhood that the two friends had visited Cornouilles.

The Englishwoman crossed the room, raised the blinds, and opened one of the windows. The light invaded the room.

"I see no one," she said as she leaned out. "You dreamed it, dear, unless the chauffeur . . ."

"You know perfectly well, Fanny, that he never comes to the house at this time," replied Berthe impatiently. "And it isn't the day for the gardener. I am certain that I heard a man's step on this side." (She pointed to the wall facing the east towards the incline of the hill in the direction of the wood). "Oh, Fanny, I beg of you to go and see."

In order to calm her, Fanny obeyed. She herself cast a glance over the garden, and then went to the servants' quarters to make inquiries.

The domestic service was undertaken by a cook, a charwoman and a chambermaid. There were no men in the house, as, in the Englishwoman's opinion, French men-servants were not to be governed by women living alone. At night, however, the chauffeur slept on the ground-floor near the hall. In the garden Fanny noticed nothing suspicious; none of the three servants had seen any stranger or heard any footsteps.

"I shall tell Mademoiselle Berthe that Justine has gone to the back of the house to pick laurel leaves. You tell her that, too, if she asks you."

Berthe allowed herself to be pacified, while protesting that "Justine had walked like a man." Fanny remained convinced that Berthe's ears had been under an hallucination, perhaps during a nightmare, while she slept for a minute. She herself was impervious to fear of invisible dangers. For the rest, she perceived with pleasure that her pupil was

better. The crisis, brought about by the morning walk, was subsiding. Her temperature was taken under the armpit, and it was found to be normal. Berthe rose and occupied herself until the time for lunch with painting a bouquet of striped carnations. Seated beside her, Fanny read one of those interminable English novels which, in the course of four hundred pages, say nothing and none the less delight a hundred thousand readers. This particular one was called *The Christian Twins*.

After lunch the doctors ordered Berthe complete rest, and if possible sleep. And so the custom was at the "Hut" that as soon as these ladies had returned to the drawing-room they were not to be disturbed on any pretext for an hour, and that no noise should trouble the house. Berthe stretched herself out—and almost always slept profoundly—on a sofa in the smaller drawing-room which was kept dark, the door of the communication with the larger drawing-room being left open. Fanny, in the meanwhile, settled down in this larger room, reading, writing, smoking cigarettes and not neglecting to drink one of those "alcoholic potions" which were, she insisted, indispensable to her health. Since the increased heat the door of the larger drawing-room remained open on to the steps, which a verandah, covered by glass, enveloped above and in front, leaving free to right and left the double approach of the steps.

Everything passed that day as usual. Berthe lay down and went to sleep almost immediately. Fanny watched over her for some time, sitting beside her. Through the door, still opening into the larger drawing-room, there came enough light for her to

distinguish clearly the body of the young girl stretched out under the cover of a light plaid, and her head, so pale with its blonde hair, sinking into the pillow. "Oh, my dear, my dear!" murmured the Englishwoman as she looked down on this fragile being buried in an opaque sleep, one of those sleeps from which the anæmic awakens overwhelmed by a yet heavier lassitude. "Oh, my own dear! My dear one, my only dear!" It was sincere, the strange girl leaning over Berthe's pillow had no other love in the world but for this frail sleeping creature. Truly enough, she was ready to lose all to keep her, and she would have given her own life to cure her. Truly enough, too, she had the right to be indignant when she surprised smiles or veiled allusions about this love of hers; few young girls of twenty remained as chaste ignorant as Berthe with Fanny as her governess. And yet the love of these two women, which no brutality had ever soiled, was not merely the love of the mother for the daughter, or the reasonable affection of two girl friends. It was a kind of chosen relationship, and an impassioned relationship. It implied the permanent need of being near each other, physical and moral admiration on both sides, the mutual spirit of sacrifice. It implied also all the tyrannies and iniquities of love; it implied jealousy. Berthe was jealous of Fanny: it displeased her to hear Fanny say of another young girl that she was pretty. Fanny's jealousy, still more dominating, strictly denied to Berthe the right of living beside or for any other human being than herself. And the more the affections to which Berthe seemed tempted to yield were natural and legitimate, the more Fanny opposed them. Thus she had separated her succes-

sively from her fiancé and her family. Thus she had forbidden her to see again her dying mother.

Fanny bent over her and brushed with her lips the blonde hair, the mass of which was pushed towards the top of the head by the pillow. Then she left the room on tiptoe, closed the door softly and crossed the larger drawing-room as far as the steps. The air was flashing as in summer. There was scarcely any noise towards the village. . . . Leaving the window-door open on the verandah, shaded by the blinds, Fanny returned to seat herself in a large wicker arm-chair with her back to the bay. She lit a cigarette, poured herself out a glass of Chartreuse (an addition she had made to the so-called pharmaceutical substances), emptied it in two or three mouthfuls, took up *The Christian Twins*, and began to read. Her cigarette finished, she placed the book on the little table. The midday heat, combined with the fumes of alcohol, produced every day this same effect on her: a few minutes, at most a quarter of an hour, of drowsiness—after which she woke up, with her head thoroughly clear and lucid, her powerful organism restored to equilibrium by this brief relaxation.

She did not sleep quite so long this time, and her short slumber was unpleasant. She dreamed that she felt behind her the presence of some one. Her blood curdled; motionless, she could not turn round to see who it was, and a horrible fear agonized in the dream this heart which in its waking hours was ignorant of fear. The effort that she made to move caused her to open her eyes again; still only half awake, she continued to be frightened for a moment, imagining *that there really was some*

one behind her. From the steps to which her back was turned a motionless human presence was projecting itself, so to speak, towards the large silent room. Fanny perceived even the vague shadow that this presence cast on the waxed floor. In her half awakened state her agony increased for a moment, prolonging her powerlessness to stir as in the nightmare. Then, recovering full consciousness, she mastered herself; she ceased to be afraid, she even pondered for a second as to what she was going to do. With a single well-calculated movement she rose, and keeping the arm-chair as a light rampart between herself and the door leading to the steps, she turned round. *

A man was indeed standing erect just in the bay of the window, with his head bent forward and his glance lowered; one would have said that he was collecting his thoughts before entering. Perhaps even, coming from the glittering out-of-doors, he had not perceived the Englishwoman concealed in her arm-chair. On the abrupt movement of Fanny, he raised his head and looked at her, and then Fanny understood the danger, for the eyes of old Haumont-Segré, whom she recognized at once, radiated that rapturous energy which betrays madness ready for action. Besides, he was bareheaded, and there was a rent in his trousers. "He has got into the garden by slipping in from the hill-side," thought Fanny. "Berthe really did hear him. . . ." Like all courageous people, she felt herself more resolute before imminent danger. She thought first of all of Berthe, of protecting Berthe, and even, if possible, Berthe's sleep, against the madman. During the few seconds in which they were face to face without

speaking she thought: "To reach the button of the bell. . . . But this button is five steps away from me . . . the madman will prevent me. . . . I must calm him, and ring without his seeing me. . . ." And while making her way to the wall, she said in a low voice, with her eyes on those of the old man, and forcing herself not to irritate him: "Monsieur, what is your business here?"

He replied in the same tone—

"Berthe is here?"

"No," said Fanny.

"Berthe is here," he repeated.

He advanced into the drawing-room and seized the left arm of the governess who was trying to ring. Although Madame Haumont-Segré had often spoken to her about it in former days, Fanny had no suspicion of the old man's strength. She felt her arm gripped as it were by iron; at the same time, the other hand of the justiciary fell on her mouth before she had time to open it to cry out. Then, while her left arm, now loosened, fell down numbed with pain, the Englishwoman, still gagged by a feverish palm and with iron fingers breaking her jaw, became suffocated under the burning pressure of the other hand, the hand that had freed her numb arm. Already she could utter no cry, and ungagging her, he strangled her with his two hands. She understood that she was going to die. She tried to kick at Haumont-Segré's limbs; but her own limbs could not even move. All the vital force that was left her was already insufficient to fight against asphyxia. Face to face, the two enemies spoke one last time their hatred from their eyes, pupil to pupil. Then Haumont-Segré experienced suddenly the strange

sensation of sustaining by the neck this great feminine body that had all at once become very heavy, and he had to straighten himself vigorously to avoid falling forward with it. . . . He placed it gently on the ground at full length, and having thus stretched it out, unlocked his fingers carefully.

The Englishwoman stirred no more.

* * * * *

In the train that was taking them towards Cagnes, Guy Croze and his wife had the compartment to themselves. Yvonne could not control her sobs. She moaned out—

"I knew well that we had not done with being miserable. Ah! that menace of something fearful to come, how I felt that it was round us!"

Guy tried to console her.

"Your uncle's act is that of a madman. . . . Berthe's letter tells us that he was smiling beside the corpse when he was arrested. He will not even be brought to trial. My father has still enough influence to prevent that."

"And Berthe . . . already so ill; this is going to finish her."

"I don't find her letter desperate," protested Guy.

He read the opening lines again—

"Yvonne, come to my rescue. . . . My father, doubtless in a dispute, for no one saw anything, had an attack of violent fever, and killed Fanny."

"No," repeated Guy, "that's not the tone of despair. . . . One would say that death has broken the enchantment."

The luminous little village, the sunlit bays could be seen dotted along the shore; the dawdling train stopped often in the tranquil stations, where, except

for the industrious tinkling of a bell, everything seemed to be having a siesta beneath the sun. Just as they were passing Gulf Juan, Yvonne murmured—

“If we have children, I would rather have them remaining all their lives ignorant little boors than open our house to Sandras, Mags or Fannys. They have done us too much harm.”

“And they are so different from us, so far from us, that we do not even understand why they have done us this harm,” replied Guy. “It was no use their living among us, we have never known them. . . . But here’s Cagnes. Courage!”

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The Westminster Press (Gerrards Ltd.)
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